

AND OBEY?

L. C. DUNSTERVILLE

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AND OBEY ?

BY

Major-General L. C. DUNSTERVILLE

Author of "Adventures of Dunsterforce"

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“ At a Mansfield wedding the other day the word ‘obey’ was omitted from the service. There seems to be a superstition in the locality that the word means something.”

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AND OBEY ?

CHAPTER I

APRIL FOOLS' DAY, and in seventeen days Peggy Campbell would be seventeen years old. It was a beautiful spring morning and Peggy had betaken herself to Highfield Woods to escape the wrath of a pompous father, whose dignity had been disturbed and temper ruffled by her complete success in making an April Fool of him. Nothing at all original or clever but just hugely successful—an upset inkpot with a glistening pool of blue-black ink, pot and pool made in one piece out of enamelled metal and purchased at a toyshop for a shilling.

The inkpot had been placed on the snowy white table-cloth beside Sir Clarence's plate at the breakfast table, with a penholder carelessly thrown down beside it. Father was an early bird and always first in to breakfast to sniff at the postmarks and distribute the morning post, and he had fallen into the trap head-foremost with a most unhesitating plunge.

How frightfully he denounced the idiot who dared to use the breakfast table for such ridiculous purposes !

When Peggy, expecting applause, picked up inkpot and blot in one piece leaving the cloth unspotted,

she found to her dismay that the paternal wrath was merely intensified. To have ink upset on the cloth was unbearable, but to be made a complete fool of by a chit of a girl was beyond all limits of endurance.

So though highly successful in its original intention, the effort was a pronounced failure in the jocular sense. It's no earthly use playing jokes on people who have no sense of humour.

It is not to be wondered at that the culprit took the earliest opportunity of fleeing from the offended presence.

Here in the woods everything was delightful, and Peggy threw herself down on a mossy bank to contemplate the hollowness of existence. What a fraud life was. April Fools' Day is meant for a certain purpose and when you use your best intelligence to carry out that purpose successfully, people storm and swear at you. It's as bad as the mistletoe myth. It is said to be permissible for a young man to kiss a young woman at a certain season of the year if she happens to be standing beneath the mistletoe. But young men who avail themselves of the privilege generally get into trouble.

Why do people always talk as if these things were permissible—they always do talk like that—and then storm and rage when you avail yourself of the permission ?

If Sir Clarence was very upset in one sense Peggy was even more so in another. Thoroughly good-tempered herself and always bubbling over with merriment, the sight of sulky wrath in another, and worst of all in a parent, made her feel out of joint with life in general. Moods like that sweep over

us with great violence at the age of seventeen, and, Peggy's moods were always extremes.

Here, though only a few hundred yards from the house, she could feel cut off from the worries of the world. There had been no rain for a week and the sun shone brightly through the slender twigs of the old birch tree at the foot of which she had thrown herself down. A few yards away tinkled the little stream in which she had delighted as a child to imagine mermaids' pools, with tiny caves on the banks peopled by elves and fairies. It was sad to feel that one had got for ever beyond the elves-and-fairies stage and was being compelled to realise the serious side of life. But the merry side of Peggy's temperament was not checked for long by these gloomy reflections. The slight lines around the mouth and the tiniest of frowns on the smooth forehead gradually faded away as the recollection of the upset inkpot brought a roguish smile to her lips once more. Now that she was safe in this happy retreat even father's wrath seemed only to add to the joke. And after all one must make allowances for the previous generation.

They were good people in their way and one was taught to honour and obey one's parents, but it was not dishonouring them to face the facts, and the facts were that they were out of date and hopelessly out of touch with this new world in which the younger generation flourished.

With these kindly thoughts soothing her injured feelings, Peggy was almost falling into a doze when she was startled by the sound of breaking twigs and the rustle of dead leaves from the direction of a clump of evergreens a little further up the stream,

on the opposite bank, and, before she had time to wonder who the intruder might be, a pleasant-looking young woman dressed in rather smart tweeds emerged from the bushes, moving towards her without apparently being aware of her presence.

This would be an April Fool for father with a vengeance, if he happened to pass along ! The idea of trespassers always drove him into a frenzy, and here was this delightful looking girl wandering about in his precious woods as if she owned them. Even Peggy might have felt some resentment, if mirth had not triumphed as she pictured the perfectly gorgeous row there would be if Sir Clarence did happen along just then.

From the uncertainty of her movements it would look as if the trespasser had lost her way. One could hardly suppose that she would have the cheek to wander round Highfields so close to the house if she realised where she was. Still Peggy was feeling anything but amiable and forgiving, and she resented the calm way in which the strange girl, who had now caught sight of her, instead of displaying the consciousness of guilt nodded smilingly and said :

“ Good morning. I’ve lost my way. Can you tell me where I am ? ”

Peggy liked the look of the new-comer but the earlier events of the day had irritated her, and she had a strong feeling that trespassers ought to be sat upon, so she replied rather sharply :

“ Yes, I can tell you where you are. You’re in Highfield Woods, and you’re trespassing. Father would be very angry if he caught you.”

“ Oh. I’m so sorry. Perhaps you’d be kind enough to show me some way by which I could

sneak back on to the high road without running into your angry father."

"Yes, I suppose I can do that, but as you really are trespassing I think I ought to ask who you are, and how you came here. I am Peggy Campbell."

"I am Emily Polter. That is to say, Mrs. Edward Polter. My people, the Coles, live at Fir Grove and I am on a visit to them for Easter. We've only been at Fir Grove two years you know, and I am sorry your people don't know mine. But I know you quite well by sight. It was such a lovely morning I wandered over the fields looking for early primroses and came further than I intended. I thought I could get a short cut to the road through this wood but I would never have ventured in it if I had known how close it was to the house. I'm not a bit afraid of Sir Clarence and his wrath. The law doesn't allow you to do anything to trespassers except swear at them, and hard words break no bones, but I hate hurting people's feelings or making them angry. So please, now you know all about me, do get a move on and help me to safety."

This was a most exciting announcement for Peggy. So this very charming girl, who looked hardly any older than herself, was actually a married woman and one of those dreadful Coles, whom her father and mother refused to know, and whose arrival two years ago in that horrid new house with the appalling name of "Fir Grove" had irritated and annoyed not only Sir Clarence and Lady Campbell, but all their exclusive circle of acquaintances. Business people from the north of England daring to settle down in Hurstcombe !

Peggy had seen various members of the Cole

family at church and at parish festivities, and was always curious to know whether they were really so dreadful as people made out. This Emily, at any rate, seemed quite a nice person and Peggy felt glad to have the opportunity of talking with her, so she offered to show her the way out of the forbidden territory on to a right-of-way footpath that would lead her back almost to Fir Grove.

She knew she was sinning deeply in walking and chatting so familiarly with a Cole, but that only added spice to the enjoyment.

"So you're one of the twins," she said. "I remember the twins being married last year. But you look more like a schoolgirl than a married woman."

"Yes, we Coles have a reputation for looking younger than our ages, and I was only nineteen when I married. I'm twenty now but I feel more like sixteen. My husband is a schoolmaster in a Secondary School in Cheshire, so I ought soon to steady down in such sober surroundings."

Peggy narrated the incident of the morning and the two girls laughed heartily as they emerged from the wood. Emily was safely guided to the footpath just beyond the large notice board warning the public that "Trespassers will be prosecuted", and here they parted. Peggy would gladly have walked on for the rest of the morning with such a kindred spirit, but with all her pluck she didn't feel equal to facing a second dose of paternal wrath, with maternal wrath as well thrown in this time, if it were known that she had met one of the Coles, talked and walked with her, and taken a great liking to her. Also, as these Coles were for some reason

or another "untouchables" she felt a little compunction in sinning against the family's decision of ostracism.

So with a farewell wave of the hand she left Emily to pursue her way homewards while she returned to Highfields with an ever increasing appetite, and a fierce longing for lunch induced by the fact that the stormy scene in the morning had made it impossible for her to do justice to her breakfast.

CHAPTER II

THE little village of Hurstcombe lies below the eastern edge of Dartmoor far removed from the broader highways by which crowds of trippers motor up to the moor in summer time. It is one of those English villages so dear to the heart and so beautiful to the eye that are so impossible to live in unless you have grown up there and are by heredity as much a part of the village as the old oaks and elms and the ancient cottages. Sir Clarence Campbell was the squire of the village and the fourth generation of his family to be born at the old house of Highfields, a spacious and comfortable residence with little architectural beauty, but mellowed in a century and a half, and with the aid of luxuriant ivy, to a distinctly pleasing appearance. The original house, of which only the foundations remained, was built in the fourteenth century, destroyed by fire in the beginning of the eighteenth, and the present house built by the original Campbell in 1740.

Sir Clarence was a handsome, well set up man of sixty, always immaculately dressed, a good sportsman, and a first rate judge of a horse. He had married in 1883 Alice Wendover, of the well-known Monmouthshire family, who had brought him a considerable fortune in addition to her good looks. Their family consisted of Aubrey, the only son, now

twenty-three years of age ; Gwendoline, a beautiful and rather headstrong girl a year and a half younger ; Mary, soon to celebrate her twentieth birthday ; Isabel, just over eighteen, and Peggy the irrepressible.

Up till ten years ago when he received his knighthood, Sir Clarence had taken a very active part in politics as a staunch Conservative, but from that time he had retired from the political arena to devote himself to the management of his estate, the bringing up of his children, and the enjoyment of hunting, shooting, and fishing.

At election times he threw himself with all his vigour into the support of his party, but beyond that he never cared to go. London he hated and never visited except when business compelled him to do so.

In spite of his rather fierce temper, and his domineering character, his position as head of the house was more apparent than real. Lady Campbell, who was a noted beauty at the time of their marriage and who now at forty-eight was still remarkably beautiful and attractive, had her own way at all times on all matters of importance. Not that her husband allowed her to have it, or even knew that she had it. She just had it, and being as clever as she was beautiful, her masterful husband never realised that he was over-mastered. But the family knew it all right. They could smile at father's bluster and bad temper, but it was a serious affair when mother was annoyed. As a married couple they were devoted to each other and an example to the neighbourhood. But there had been trying times of which outsiders were not aware. Sir Clarence had an eye for a pretty girl, and there had

been an infatuation four years ago for a very attractive widow—a case very satisfactorily settled by the watchful wife.

With the exception of Gwendoline, who had been abroad for six months and was now with friends in India on her way to spend the summer in Kashmir, all the family were assembled at Highfields for Easter. Aubrey, who had taken his degree at Oxford last summer, and had since been doing secretarial work for the rising Conservative genius, Mr. George Kenilworth, M.P., had come reluctantly from London at his mother's special request. It was not that he was too absorbed in his work, but he was happy in London and hated the country except in the shooting and hunting season. Mary, who was studying medicine at Girton, was home for the vac after her second term, taking her career very seriously and not at all appreciating Aubrey's ponderous jokes on the subject of women doctors. Isabel was back from school at Dresden where she was supposed to be improving her music, and Peggy was enjoying a release from her school in Hampshire, with a promise of a permanent release after the summer term. She was distinctly clever but far from studious, and her dislike of school discipline landed her in frequent trouble.

There were only two or three families within a radius of five miles who enjoyed the privilege of the Campbells' society. Colonel and Mrs. Mandersfield of Upton Green, about two miles away on the road to Newton Abbot, and the quaint old bachelor, Major Tom Robertson of Bothwell, a small place just beyond the Mandersfields where the retired soldier interested himself in growing fruit and

rearing poultry, were almost their only friends in the immediate neighbourhood. Colonel Mandersfield had retired from the army in 1905 after commanding his battalion in South Africa. His wife was a gentle uncomplaining invalid, never really quite as bad as she thought she was, though her feebleness was not altogether a pose. She had had a good deal of malaria fifteen years ago when her husband's regiment had been stationed at Dum-Dum near Calcutta, and from that date most of her petty ailments were attributed to the after effects of the fever. The Mandersfields were devoted to their two children, Sinclair, who was just finishing his time at Malvern and was to go to Cambridge in October with a view of eventually qualifying for the Diplomatic service, and Beatrice, a very pretty child of thirteen who had up to now been educated by Mrs. Prenter, the schoolmaster's wife, and who showed signs at her early age of considerable independence of character.

Major Tom Robertson had been given his commission in the 2nd. Battalion of the Blankshire regiment in the same year as Colonel Mandersfield, and both had served in the second Afghan war with that battalion, after which Major Robertson had transferred to the Indian Army and, after seeing much service on the North-West-Frontier had retired in 1899, unfit for further service owing to wounds received in Waziristan. A confirmed bachelor, he had settled down at Bothwell to be near his old friends. His hobbies of breeding poultry and growing fruit kept him happily occupied, and as Beatrice's godfather he felt himself almost one of the Mandersfield family.

He was quite the pattern of the "old soldier", carrying his umbrella at the slope or the trail when he marched to church, and looking on life generally from the barrack-square point of view. A fine, manly, straight-forward type, living his life by rules and regulations, and consequently regarded as rather a nuisance by his less intimate friends and neighbours, who pronounced him full of whims and fads. No character is ever entirely consistent, and Major Tom Robertson's weak spot was his most unsoldierly habit of taking the other fellow's point of view—a fatal propensity where discipline is concerned.

The only other people of importance admitted to social intimacy with the Campbells were the Vicar and his wife. The Reverend James Carford was in every sense a good man, of strong Evangelistic tendencies, and a real father to the people of his parish.

James Carford was sixty-five years of age but always in robust good health, and of untiring energy. Every moment he could spare from the duties of his parish he devoted to the study of natural history. His wife was a few years younger, and shared his tastes in every way, equalling him in her devotion to the responsibilities of her position. They had no children.

Lunch at Highfields was a somewhat heavy meal adapted to hearty appetites. There were no dyspeptics or food cranks in the Campbell family, no one who wanted to subsist on a nut diet, and no one who had been ordered by the doctor to avoid this or that delicacy. Peggy was voracious, after her spoilt breakfast and her morning walk, and Aubrey unkindly called attention to her record performance.

"You'll never keep that nice little figure of yours, Peg, if you always take three helpings of everything."

"I'm glad you think I've a nice little figure, Aubrey. Whether I want to keep it or not is a matter for myself. What I want is food, and not brotherly advice. I'll make a note of what you say, however, and think it over later."

Sir Clarence had recovered his temper, and the inkpot incident was not referred to. He was fond and proud of his children, and Peggy, in spite of her impish nature, was his favourite. Nothing could have been serener than the domestic atmosphere, conversation was brisk and cheerful, and Peggy had almost forgotten the incident of her morning's walk, when Aubrey quite innocently remarked to Mary :

"Ripping out this morning. Don't often get an April day with quite such a spring feeling in the air. Where were you and Peggy trotting off to ?"

"Why trotting ? Girls don't trot. Why on earth do you use such silly expressions ? If I saw you and father out for a walk, I wouldn't say I had seen you trotting. Anyway, you didn't see me because I wasn't out the whole morning either trotting, galloping, or even walking."

"Well it was Peggy, anyway. There's no mistaking her, and the other one looked extremely like my dear sister Mary. Who was it, Peg ?"

George Washington was nothing to Peggy, who could no more tell a deliberate lie than she could fly, and hated any form of evasion or half-lie. There was nothing to do but to face the music, so Peggy answered in the clearest and most unconcerned tones :

"I was walking with Mrs. Edward Polter."

“Polter, Polter,” grunted Sir Clarence, “Polter. Never heard the name. Where did you pick her up ?”

“She had lost her way ; as a matter of fact she was trespassing in the wood, when I met her and she asked me to show her the way back to the road.”

“Wish I’d seen her instead of you. I’d have had something to say to her. But did she drop out of the sky ? We don’t keep Polters in Hurstcombe, and this isn’t the season for trippers.”

In for a penny in for a pound. The conversation might be deftly turned, but why ? If there’s going to be a row let’s have it and be done with it. Thus decided Peggy as she replied :

“She was a Miss Cole, married last year to a Mr. Polter”—and then with a sort of bravado—“she seemed a jolly good sort, and I felt quite sorry we don’t know the Coles.”

The earth didn’t open and swallow anybody up, but it seemed as if it might do so at any moment. Sir Clarence grew purple in the face, his eyes goggled as he blurted out, “Good God ! you don’t” but the firm quiet voice of Lady Campbell cut him short.

“Don’t make a fuss about trifles, Clarence. Peggy, you are a very silly girl and seem to have a genius for doing the wrong thing. Nobody wants to know if you’re sorry for the Coles, or what the Coles are like. We do not know them, and you consequently cannot know them. It’s no good discussing things like this at all, but if you want to know more about it we can talk it over after lunch.”

“Thanks, mother, I should like to,” retorted Peggy, mentally agreeing that there was nothing to

be gained by a general family discussion on the subject. Aubrey commented: "Those bounders who live in that delightful suburban villa 'Fir Grove.' I remember seeing the twins last year before the double wedding took place. I must say I thought one of them a jolly pretty girl, and the other not bad. People of that class often are rather attractive."

"Of what class, Aubrey?" put in Peggy.

"Oh, don't argue, silly," said Aubrey, at a loss for the right answer. "I mean people like the Coles. Sort of trades-people I suppose, don't you know?"

"One sees them at church, and they are quite a decent lot to look at," ventured Mary, "but then if one is to include among one's acquaintances any people who are decent to look at, where is one going to stop? I hate social rules but I suppose we've got to have them."

Isabel was quite the aristocrat of the family. "I shouldn't care in the least what people looked like," she said. "If they are bounders they are bounders, and good looks have nothing to do with one's capacity for bounding."

"Well," concluded Peggy. "Now you've all had your little says, and I'm sure we're all grateful to you for your words of wisdom. Let's talk about something else."

After lunch Sir Clarence retired fuming, to smoke a cigar in the library, and the rest of the family dispersed in various directions.

Peggy sat with her mother in the sunny window of the morning-room where they were not likely to be disturbed. She felt rather thrilled. She didn't really care tuppence about these Coles, but she did

want to puzzle out the meaning of social codes, and she did like to have mysteries explained. She knew well enough that the Coles, though probably very decent folk, did not belong, and probably did not wish to belong, to the same social sphere as her own people. But there must be more in it than just that, to justify her father's fury and her mother's calm indignation, and it would be exciting to hear tales of fraudulent bankruptcy, or felony of some sort, or perhaps even a suspected murder. So she really felt quite grateful to her mother for offering to discuss the matter with her. But Lady Campbell intended no discussion. She would explain things to Peggy and leave it at that.

“The house called Fir Grove was built, as you remember, three years ago by a speculator who sold it to this Mr. Cole. It was built on land adjoining your father's estate, a particular piece of land that he had intended to purchase himself. The transaction was carried out while we were travelling in Italy, and you can imagine your father's annoyance when he found that owing to the stupidity of his agent the land had slipped through his fingers and was to be built upon. You can realise also, how distressed the whole village was at the appalling yellow brick construction, a blot on the landscape, that added to its vileness by christening itself ‘Fir Grove’. The culminating horror came when we found that the house had been purchased by some small business man from the north of England, who intended to reside there. The Coles arrived and took up their residence. Surely it must be quite obvious to you that we could not possibly visit such people ; it is quite certain that they would not

expect us to do so. So of course we did not call, and we never shall. They may be very estimable people but we do not know them and don't want to. I admit it is a little embarrassing with such near neighbours, but what is one to do ? Aubrey calls them all bounders, but I don't think he is at all right. As far as I can see there is nothing in which they outwardly differ to any great extent from ourselves, but although we live in what are called ' democratic ' days, one must have some regard for birth and breeding, and one cannot be on terms of intimacy with people who have neither the one nor the other. If you, in your thoughtless way, strike up acquaintance with members of the Cole family you must see what an embarrassing situation you create. It is bad enough as it is. We meet them wherever we go. They are such extremely active people. Two of the boys sing in the choir, and have very good voices.

" They have got to know Mr. Prenter the school-master, and are arranging with him to run some theatricals in the schoolroom in aid of something or other, a thing which your father resents, as I do too, as an unheard-of impertinence. These business people get their noses in everywhere, and snubbing them seems no use. I have met Mrs. Cole on occasions connected with parish work, and I have had to be positively rude to her to check her too friendly advances, while the whole village is laughing at the way in which your father sat on Mr. Cole when he had the temerity to offer his opinion at a ' general meeting ' in connection with the Annual Flower Show. So just leave them alone, dear. You don't want them, and they don't want you. If you meet Mrs. Polter again you can just look as if you had

never met her, and if she speaks to you, you can easily show her that you do not desire to continue the acquaintance."

Lady Campbell spoke calmly in a firm voice. Peggy admitted to herself that, given social conditions as they are, mother's point of view was just and reasonable. But she felt she could not possibly agree with the concluding sentence.

"I hope, mother, for your peace of mind that I shall not meet Mrs. Polter again. But I must honestly tell you it would be a pleasure for me to do so, and I would sooner die than do what you suggest. If she speaks to me I shall be delighted to speak to her."

"Well, Peggy, have it your own way. You've always been rather a wild creature and I cannot compel you to obey my orders. But please remember it is an order. I don't often give orders, as you know, but when I do I mean them, and am not likely to retract."

With this concluding sentence Lady Campbell rose from her chair and sailed from the room, leaving Peggy in a state of unhappy bewilderment. "After all," she thought, "what a fuss about trifles. I don't care a brass farthing for the Coles, but all this talk about social things makes me sick."

The two great incidents of this day soon drifted into oblivion, but the latter especially left a very permanent impression on the young girl's mind. Peggy, although at all times wild and unruly, hated the idea of disobeying her mother, but she had an instinctive determination to be true to herself, and no amount of parental orders would ever make her do an action she conceived to be "not playing the

game," or prevent her from doing what she conceived the rules of the game required.

No actual test of her obedience, was, however, required in the present instance, as during the remainder of the Easter holidays she never caught a glimpse of the Coles, except on Sundays at church, and once or twice she met members of the family, but luckily never Emily, in the village. Nor did she even honour the Cole family by bestowing a single thought on them.

At the age of seventeen one lives very much in the present, and one's mind is occupied almost entirely with the duties and amusements each day brings forth.

April is not a month in which there is much doing in the country, except for serious people like farmers and fruit growers, and even with the Mandersfields, of whom they saw a good deal, and some cousins who came to stay for a fortnight, life at Highfields was far from exciting. There were occasional rides on the moor, and drives into Newton Abbot, two bridge parties, and one dinner party at Upton Green. Aubrey soon found that his services were urgently required in London, and said good-bye to Highfields about the middle of the month. Mary was absorbed in reading, and shut herself up with her books most of the time. Isabel and Peggy, who had always been chums, spent a good deal of time riding and driving round to visit more distant friends, and occasionally getting into scrapes with mother or father for over-heating the horses, or for similar misdemeanours.

By the end of the month the girls had gone back to university and school, and peace reigned once more at Highfields.

CHAPTER III

FIR GROVE wasn't really a bad little place. It certainly was dreadfully new, and its bright yellow bricks and red tile roof did not seem quite to fit the landscape. But things have got to be new some time. Mr. Cole was by no means a man of bad taste and was quite aware of its artistic shortcomings, but he considered the drawbacks of the exterior were more than balanced by the comfort and convenience of the interior.

The house stood in about four acres of ground, well away from the road. Great progress had been made in the garden during the two years of its occupation. The owner was a man of many hobbies, and among these gardening took first place. Roses and begonias especially had flourished under his care, and now, in the early days of August, were making a really fine show. The tennis lawn also had taken well but was not to be played on till next year.

Mr. Henry Cole was thoroughly pleased with his purchase ; he liked Devonshire and the Devonshire people, though both land and people were a great contrast to those he had been accustomed to. Lancashire born and bred, nothing would have induced him to leave that county, had not his doctor insisted on a change of climate for Mrs. Cole who needed something milder than the bracing air of Lancashire.

He was a remarkably interesting character, and a pleasant person to look at, bearing no resemblance at all to the familiar caricatures of retired business men, but looking on the contrary very much like the ordinary English gentleman.

And this was peculiar, because he was by no means a "gentleman" in the social sense of that word—quite the reverse—a self-made man risen by his own efforts from the ranks of labour. He was rich, but quite devoid of ostentatious vulgarity, and though he always took pleasure in telling the tale of his rise in life from a factory lad to the head of a large concern, he never pressed this recital on unwilling listeners. His success had certainly been phenomenal, enabling him to retire at the age of fifty, leaving the business in the efficient care of his eldest son, Henry.

His retirement was much against his own wishes, but as a move to the west of England was imperative for his wife's health he had thought it best to cut himself entirely adrift from business and settle with her in the new land.

He was a great reader, and was quite able to hold his own in subjects of general knowledge with men whose education had cost their fathers large sums of money. Grammar sometimes failed him, and now and then an "H" went astray. The previous generations of Coles had been Methodists but Henry Cole had left that community for the Established Church soon after his marriage. He was a deeply religious man and a great student of the Bible, which he was fond of reading aloud to his wife. She encouraged him in this, not so much because she found she derived spiritual enjoyment from it, but he read well and it was a pleasure to hear him, and

the Old Testament names were a splendid exercise for his H's. "Ahab" was the greatest stumbling block. It seemed hopeless to try and get it right, and the good tempered Henry found the constant corrections almost too much for his endurance. It came naturally as "A'ab", and an endeavour to correct this produced "Hahab". This being rejected, "Ha'ab" was tried, and the final effort produced Ahab. But even after all these years it was considered a risky word to tackle.

The Coles were a devoted couple, and very proud of their five children. Henry Cole, junior, the eldest, was head of his father's business at the age of twenty-six, a great responsibility for so young a man, but he was of quite an exceptional temperament, and seemed to have grown up without ever having been young. He had been a solemn baby, he was a studious and exemplary boy, and as a young man had the gravity and sententiousness of a grandfather.

The twins, Emily and Margaret, six years younger than Henry, were lively and comely young people, the former being quite a pretty girl, the latter nice to look at but certainly not a beauty.

Three weddings last year had removed the eldest son and the twins from the family circle. Henry had married Harriet Longforth, the daughter of a well-to-do farmer in the home country. Emily had become Mrs. Edward Polter and had settled with her husband in Cheshire where he was an assistant master in a Secondary school. Margaret had married Fred Saunders, a cheerful young man who was trying to run a motor business in Liverpool.

John Preston Cole, the second son, was a good-

looking, well-built young man of twenty-two, tall and dark like his father. Like his elder brother Henry he had never given his parents a moment's anxiety, but, unlike him, he was of a strikingly original temperament, and though he inherited his father's religious tendencies, he held views on religion and ethics which often shocked his father and bewildered his mother. He was a striver, but not a pusher, high-spirited and sensitive—people said "thin-skinned"—a good son in every sense, but not as much under parental control as his father would have wished.

He had to know the "Why and Wherefore" for everything, and took nothing for granted. He was not naturally ambitious, nor anxious to succeed in a general sense, but once he had determined on a certain line of conduct nothing in the world would move him. Emily suggested that when he had made a name for himself and aspired to the dignity of a coat-of-arms, he should have the simple device of a block of granite with the motto "Do or Die."

He had been educated at a private school, where he was known as The Freak, on account of his tendency to do things in a different way to the ordinary mortal. He always did pretty well at his work, but was seldom top of the class or a prize-winner. It was rather distressing to the family that he seemed inclined to apply his topsy-turvy ideas to business, and, although he had always been an average well-behaved boy, now that he had attained manhood and had started in the business, Mr. Cole had begun to be distinctly anxious for the future. What is to become of a boy who is sorry when he's got the better of another man in a deal, and who is pleased only

when he can feel that the other man has made a good bargain ?

He was an enthusiastic athlete, and had won more prizes for sports at school than for his bookwork.

After John came Percy, a sprightly youth of nineteen, the constant joy of his merry companions and the despair of his parents. Percy could do most things well if he tried, but he seldom wanted to try. He preferred things where you don't have to try, such things as are involved in "having a real good time," and he frequently shocked his mother by the assertion that he never wanted anything in the world but to be "merry and bright." If he wanted that, he certainly got it, for nothing could be merrier or brighter than Percy Cole. Mr. Cole was not a great disciplinarian, nor was he one of those who expect old heads on young shoulders, but he had frequent cause to be distressed over Percy's escapades, and was worried by the apparent worthlessness of his character. Boyish pranks are all very well, but Percy went a good deal beyond that, and his father was terrified at the thought that his boy might any day make his appearance in a police court in connection with some shameful affair. Talking was no use, and threatening even less. Percy announced firmly that he had no use for work—later on, perhaps, but not just now—and when his father suggested stopping his allowance, he retorted, "All right, dad, whenever you like. I suppose it's up to you to support me till I'm twenty-one, but if you don't want to you needn't. I shan't starve. I dislike that more than working. I don't know how I'll get money, but I'll get it, and in the end I'll marry a rich girl. Then we'll all be happy."

Both John and Percy were at Fir Grove now for a fortnight, and inclined to find things a little dull. Tennis would have helped to pass the time, but the court was not to be played on till next year, and there didn't seem to be much chance of being invited anywhere. However, there were public courts within reach, and they could always run over to Teignmouth or Torquay in the car and enjoy sea-bathing and boating.

It was extraordinary how few of their neighbours the Coles had got to know in their two years' residence at Fir Grove. Mrs. Coles was quite aware of social distinctions, and had not expected people like the Campbells and the Mandersfields to welcome her with open arms, but at the same time both she and her husband strongly resented the unnecessarily frigid attitude towards them of the members of these families and others of their "set," as Mrs. Cole expressed it.

They had a few good friends among the farmers and the smaller fry of the countryside, and they had no desire to force themselves where they were not wanted, but as both of them were good and energetic workers for the Church or for any worthy cause, they were bound to come frequently in contact with the Squire and his friends, and it was really rather humiliating to be addressed one day by Sir Clarence on a Committee Meeting as if you were one of the upper servants, and a day later to be—not politely—ignored when you passed him in the village street. They were not angry, but rather unhappy about it.

Emily's adventure four months ago, when she had been caught trespassing at Highfields and escorted

most of the way home by Peggy Campbell, had amused and interested the family.

“ She was the dearest little girl,” said Emily, “ and we made great friends. She seemed to take a liking to me, and as she’ll probably tell her people what a charming person I am, you’ll certainly have them rushing round here in a day or two to call on the Cole family. Why people are stuck-up, I don’t know. There can be very little fun in it, and it’s not really natural to any human being. Peggy is not the only ‘stuck-up’ I’ve ever met. I’ve had the charming experience several times now, and I’ve always been astounded to find what jolly people the stuck-ups are when they become unstuck.”

The Coles awaited the call with complacency, and were a little disappointed when it never came.

The Carfords had, of course, called. As Vicar, it was his duty to do so, but had it not been his duty it would probably have been his pleasure. He was not by nature a great stickler for etiquette and caste marks, and he combined his love for Natural History with a love for Natural Man—if he were at all lovable. And he found in Mr. Cole a pleasing type of quite a new kind of man, which gave him the same sort of delight as the finding of a new or rare species of butterfly. Mrs. Carford had equally taken a fancy to the invalid Mrs. Cole, the very person she had long sought for in vain, an enthusiastic helper with the Mothers’ Union, the Girls’ Friendly Society, and other bands and leagues connected with the parish.

CHAPTER IV

THE Carfords were giving a garden party in the Vicarage grounds in aid of a fund for the restoration of the church, and the Coles had, of course, been invited. Mr. and Mrs. Cole looked forward to the event with some keenness. John Cole didn't care much about garden parties, but was glad and interested to run a show in a good cause, and he had been asked to take charge of some side-shows which it was hoped would bring in a good deal of money. Percy had no intention of going to what he called "a rotten sort of tea-party," but yielded to his mother's persuasion and promised to be there and to try and behave himself.

"If it's going to be a tea and ginger-pop show," he said to John. "I can sneak away whenever I want to, but if they've some decent claret-cup or a whiskey-and-soda on tap, I don't mind availing myself of the old boy's hospitality."

August 14th was fortunately a perfect day, and the Vicar beamed as he superintended the arrangements for the refreshment tents, stalls and side-shows. John was over at the Vicarage most of the morning helping in a general way, and rigging up his own arrangements, which included a deceptive Art Gallery and a Treasure Hunt. Preparations were made on a large scale to receive not only the whole village, but—the Vicar hoped—a large contingent from the surrounding country.

The Vicarage grounds were spacious and beautiful. There was a croquet lawn on the west side between the house and the high wall of the kitchen garden, and a fine tennis court on the south, opposite the front entrance. Beyond the tennis court the ground sloped towards a large meadow which had been thrown open for riding, driving, and bicycling competitions, of which Aubrey Campbell was to have charge, and athletic sports under the management of Sinclair Mandersfield, assisted by Mr. Prenter, the schoolmaster, and a village committee. A large tent for refreshments was rigged up in a corner of the meadow and two smaller ones against the Portugal laurels at the edge of the croquet lawn for the smarter folk, while another tent in front of the house was to contain the village band of six performers. John's Art Gallery and the various stalls where articles were to be sold were skilfully contrived in shady situations round the grounds.

Mrs. Mandersfield, assisted by Beatrice, presided over the flowers and confectionery stall; Mary Campbell had a fortune-telling tent; Isabel and Peggy united in the sale of fancy work. Mrs. Prenter, with a pretty niece to help her, was in charge of the farm produce stall, butter and eggs, cream and jam. Other stalls of every variety were entrusted to the management of important village ladies, and Mrs. Carford, assisted by Mrs. Cole, superintended the refreshment arrangements in the upper tents, those in the meadow tent being in charge of the general committee.

The proceedings were to be opened by the Squire punctually at 3 p.m.

The Coles had an early lunch, as John had promised

to be back at the Vicarage by two to help in putting finishing touches to the tents and stalls. Mrs. Cole was looking forward to the afternoon with pleasurable excitement. This was the only function on a large scale that the Coles had been invited to take part in since their arrival at Fir Grove, and it would be her first real opportunity of having a good look at her neighbours. She felt a warm, neighbourly feeling towards them all and she hoped they would feel the same towards her.

Percy was in a fretful mood and declared that the whole thing was "tommy-rot." "A lot of old parsons, and squires, and grand folk pulling the legs of the ignorant rustics and getting money out of them on false pretences, to help prop up a crumbling old church that would look a jolly sight better if they let it tumble into ruins."

As soon as lunch was over John dashed off to the Vicarage on his bicycle ; Mr. and Mrs. Cole settled themselves comfortably in cane chairs in the garden for a little rest before undertaking the arduous duties of the afternoon, and Percy retired to his room to dress himself in a manner fitting the occasion.

While affecting to despise functions of this sort, he was secretly delighted at the opportunity of displaying himself to the admiring gaze of the Hurstcombe people. He was a healthy, manly young fellow, but with no pretence at good looks. He was blissfully unconscious of this, however, and sufficiently conceited to make a very careful choice of his wardrobe.

After all, there wasn't much choice about it. Flannels were obviously the order of the day, but as he had no school or club blazer to sport, there was

some little difficulty in the matter of coats, and the real problem was the tie. He finally decided in favour of a brilliant affair somewhat in the style of the Royal Stuart tartan, which he rightly felt would be likely to attract attention and add a general brilliancy to the scene.

At a quarter to three all the officials and stallholders were at their posts, and the Vicar and Mrs. Carford had commenced receiving their guests. Judging from the large number of early arrivals, who were mostly people from a distance, the day promised to be a great success, and the various committee-men, bustling ostentatiously about with large red and white rosettes in their buttonholes, made optimistic calculations as to the probable financial result.

By three o'clock the grounds were well filled, and the band were busily tuning their instruments eager for the opportunity of displaying their skill, but so far there was no sign of the Highfields party.

At a quarter past three, when the Vicar and the men with rosettes were beginning to look a little anxious, a stir in the crowd on the entrance drive suggested an arrival of importance, and in a few moments Sir Clarence and Lady Campbell appeared.

Mrs. Carford advanced across the lawn to meet them, and Lady Campbell made polite apologies for the lateness of their arrival, referring to some temporary hitch in the starting of the car as a reason for the delay. This was obviously kind politeness, as Lady Campbell was well aware that at functions of this nature nobody ever expects the formal opening to take place until some time after the hour notified. The only need for this formality is to add a little

stateliness to the proceedings, to give the promoter and the opener a chance of explaining what it is all about, and to hint to the individual selected for the performance of the opening ceremony, that he can pay for the honour of his selection by making the largest purchases at all the stalls.

A bell was tinkled by one of the rosette-men and attention being called for, the Vicar proceeded to explain the object of the day's undertaking. First and foremost, it was his privilege to be allowed once a year to gather together his friends and neighbours in this happy way in the Vicarage grounds. In the second place, it was also the usual custom to utilise the occasion for raising funds for any deserving object—the object this year was the urgent need of money for repairs to the beautiful old church in which their forefathers had worshipped for countless generations. The sum that was needed was estimated at about £150. They could not hope to reach so high a figure as that, but he felt sure everyone would do what they could. Finally, he wished to make it clear that though the money was a matter of great importance, it was far more important from his point of view that everyone present there to-day should spend a really happy day.

After a few further remarks dealing with various details, he concluded by saying : “ I will now ask Sir Clarence Campbell to open the proceedings.”

Sir Clarence, who was a good speaker with clear, ringing voice, addressed the assembly in what the local reporter described as “ a few well-chosen words.” He referred to similar occasions in bygone years, and felt sure that to-day's proceedings would in every sense eclipse past records. He did not share the

Vicar's diffidence, and had no doubt that the required sum would be obtained. With so many charming ladies in charge of stalls stocked with every variety of wares to tempt the purchaser, and so many kind helpers among the men, success was assured. He said, in fact, all the banal things that people have to say on such occasions, but he said them very well and almost as if they were bright ideas which had just occurred to him on the spur of the moment.

With a few humorous allusions to recent events in the village, which evoked laughter and applause, and the usual funny story that is invariably introduced in the peroration, Sir Clarence led up to the thrilling announcement that the function was now duly opened. On this the two little Prenter girls, very smartly dressed in white frocks with blue sashes, and blue bows in their hair, advanced, curtsied, and presented a bouquet of flowers which was graciously accepted by Lady Campbell.

This was the signal for the band to strike up, and they proceeded to their task with the pent-up vigour of long-suppressed enthusiasm.

Groups of people stood about here and there exchanging greetings, or listening to kind words of welcome from the Vicar and his wife. Others wandered round the grounds examining the fruit and flowers and comparing horticultural experiences with each other. Others rather shyly inspected the stalls. It was rather uncomfortable examining the various displays when there was no crowd to keep one company ; it would be much nicer later on, but in the meantime some bolder spirits thought it their duty to make a start. Most people were in a

generous mood, and were fully in sympathy with the object of the appeal, but with all there was a sort of feeling that on these occasions one was often worried into buying things for far more than their value, and very often things of no earthly use. One was willing to spend up to a certain sum, but there was a latent desire to get value for money.

Most of the younger men and women had betaken themselves to the meadow where Aubrey was starting a driving competition and Sinclair had already commenced an egg-and-spoon race.

The Highfields party made a ceremonial round of the stalls, commencing with the Mandersfields', where Beatrice pinned a magnificent carnation into the Squire's buttonhole and disposed of some ornamental fern baskets to Lady Campbell.

Their fortunes were told by Mary, attired as a gipsy, at exorbitant prices. She accounted for the rather high charge by explaining that her fees were based on the financial expectations of her clients, and she had seen in both their hands lines which clearly indicated a speedy accession of wealth.

Isabel and Peggy regarded the parental visit as a glorious opportunity of getting rid of things that might be fairly regarded as unsaleable outside the walls of a lunatic asylum. Sir Clarence was saddled with a very fine purple bell-rope, in spite of his protests that everyone nowadays had electric bells. Peggy suggested it might be cut in half and make two handsome belts for dressing-gowns. He was also induced to add to his collection some Canterbury bells on a stick, most ingeniously knitted out of coloured wools by a lady in the village. Lady Campbell made generous purchases of various articles

which she thought she might add to what she called her "reserve present stock"—a collection of articles gathered on such occasions, and useful to draw upon when she found herself called on to give small presents to people of whom she was not very fond.

Large purchases were made at Mrs. Prenter's stall, and those of her neighbours, and by four o'clock the round was completed and the duties of the day might be allowed to give place to the pleasures.

The sports in the meadow seemed to be going with a great swing, and the frequent roars of applause wafted on the breeze mingled happily with the melodious strains of the band.

John's Treasure Hunt had been pronounced a great success, and he was now busy showing visitors round his Art Gallery at sixpence a time. His exhibits were well carried out, but not strikingly original, and included all the well-known leg-pulls that are intended on such occasions to amuse the visitor. He apologised for his lack of originality by his Exhibit No. 1—entitled "The Old, Old Story," and consisting of a simple chestnut on a plate.

There were not many to whom such an Art Gallery was new, but there were a few, and of these some felt rather cross at having been humbugged, and others appeared too bewildered to realise what it was all about. Poor John perspired in his efforts to explain the various jokes. "Caught in a Squall off Yarmouth" was represented by a kippered herring neatly set up on a piece of white cardboard and enclosed in a massive gold frame. In his patter dealing with this subject he explained to two old ladies, who seemed to be taking the matter rather seriously, that there was some doubt as to whether

the exhibit was actually a sea-swallow or a flying-fish—the British Association had been addressed on the subject and the reply would be notified in the public press. To this one of the old ladies replied that she was sure it was a kipper and she ought to know.

Soon after four o'clock Percy paid his sixpence and came to make fun of his brother's show. John took the opportunity of handing the business over to him for an hour while he had a look round the other shows and got a cup of tea.

Percy had, up till now, been having a good time in the sports field, displaying his many-hued tie and ogling all the pretty girls. He objected strongly to taking over the showman business, but being funny was rather in his line and he undertook to carry on for the hour. He made the most of his opportunities and though his jokes were mostly vulgar, he got plenty of applause from his rustic patrons, and soon began to feel himself quite in his element.

At 4.30 there was an interval in the Sports Programme to allow competitors and onlookers to get their tea. As Aubrey and Sinclair strolled up to join the throng on the upper lawn they passed the Art Exhibition tent, and feeling that it was up to them to patronise all the shows, they paid their sixpences and soon found themselves being conducted round by this extraordinary young man with the flaming tie, who had already attracted their attention during the merry-making in the meadow. Percy was absolutely in his element, cleverly introducing special "gag" to suit the various individuals who presented themselves. Aubrey was treated to a lot of mouldy old jokes referring to his

Oxford career, and Sinclair had to endure some witticisms on Cambridge. Neither of them knew Percy Cole by sight, though they knew of him, but he seemed to know all about them.

They both left the tent with their blood boiling.

"Who the deuce is that infernal bounder?" asked Sinclair when they got outside, and Aubrey, consulting his programme, read "Art Gallery, Mr. John Cole."

"Belongs to the Fir Grove family, I suppose. You know the funny people who bought that appalling yellow brick villa that riled father so. I don't know much about them, but I had no idea they were really quite as bad as that."

"Yes, I know the people you mean," replied Sinclair, "a decent, harmless lot I always thought them, but there is not the least doubt that this Mr. John Cole is quite the limit. It was smart of him to know that I was going to Cambridge. As for his witticisms, I felt inclined to punch his silly head."

Before entering the refreshment tent the two young men made a rapid tour round the stalls, chaffing their friends and making a few purchases.

Mr. and Mrs. Cole, feeling rather exhausted after a walk round the sports field, were glad to meet John, who carried them off to have tea.

"You're looking tired, mother," he said; "you always do too much. You must just have a nice tea and go home."

"Oh, but I haven't seen your Art Gallery, or had my fortune told yet. How's the Gallery doing?"

"Quite nicely, thanks. I've raked in over a hundred sixpences, and have left Percy in charge for an hour while I get my tea and have a look round."

"Isn't it rather risky," asked his father, "leaving Percy like that on his own? I'm sure he'd make quite a good showman, but he is very irresponsible, and I don't think he'd quite realise when he was hurting people's feelings. If his mood is in keeping with the outrageous tie he is wearing, there might be trouble."

"Percy's a good lad, father, and I made him promise not to overdo things, so I don't think you need worry."

A large table next to them had just been vacated when the Vicar entered, ushering in the Campbell party with a few friends.

As they entered, the Cole family made polite signs of humble recognition, which Lady Campbell acknowledged with a kindly smile, and Sir Clarence with a slight inclination of the head. Mrs. Cole felt that the neighbourly feeling that warmed her breast was not confined to herself alone, and hoped that she might be able later to go so far as to address a few remarks to her ladyship.

John, after swallowing two cups of tea and a slice of bread-and-butter, rose to go. "I've just got half an hour's freedom left and I want to see everything before I coop myself up again in my Art Gallery," he said to his father. "I hope you'll take mother home after this. It's a hot afternoon and she looks quite played out. But you've got to come and see my show first. I want your sixpences."

The nearest stall to the tea tent was the flower stall, and John thought he would like to adorn himself with a buttonhole. Major Robertson was there chatting with his pretty god-daughter, and he greeted John with a nod and friendly smile.

"Here's a customer for you, Beatrice ; get out your most faded flowers and put a big price on them. I hear he's made a lot out of his picture show and his pockets are full of money."

"Nonsense. I'm not going to cheat anybody. Mother went off to her tea and she said I was to give good value. What would you like, Mr. Foley ?"

"Oh, just anything you think would suit my complexion. Perhaps one of those geraniums would do. And my name is not Foley, but Cole."

"So sorry, Mr. Cole, I'll remember for the future. The geraniums and maidenhair are a shilling ; the carnations eighteen-pence, and here's an orchid for half-a-crown."

"The orchid is certainly the most beautiful, but I don't think I belong to the orchid class. I'd better have the geranium, but I hope you'll let me pay the orchid price."

"Here's the geranium, then, and it's a shilling."

John accepted the flower and put down half-a-crown, preparing to move on, but Beatrice commanded :

"Wait for your change."

"Oh, please don't trouble. It's all in a good cause."

"It isn't any trouble, and the price is a shilling," said Beatrice firmly, as she pressed the change into his unwilling hand.

As John moved on, Major Robertson said : "What a funny kid you are. I like the look of that young fellow, and it's cheek for an infant of your age to snub grown-up people. I think that he was sufficiently hurt that you should not have known his name. Besides, you have several times accepted

odd shillings since I have been here watching your sales. Why draw the line at him ? ”

“ Oh, I’m sorry. I can’t argue. I just felt like that. And why should I know his name ? ”

“ Well, they’ve been here two years and, whether you like them or not, the Coles are people one sees a good deal of in the parish.”

“ Bother the Coles and the parish. Mother says they’re dreadful people who came from nowhere and built a beastly house on Sir Clarence’s land. Here’s mother coming back, and you’ll be able to take your god-daughter round to see the sights.”

On Mrs. Mandersfield’s return Beatrice flew off with Major Robertson to have her fortune told.

John completed his inspection and purchases by a quarter past five and hastened back to relieve Percy of his duties. Two or three of the village people were leaving the tent as he approached and he heard a woman say : “ Well, he’s a comic fellow. I never laughed so much in my life. A real tip-topper, I call him.” To which her companion replied : “ Yes, he’s great on jokes. But they’re not the sort of joke the Vicar would care about if he heard his goings-on.”

“ Bother Percy,” he thought, “ he’s been overdoing it as usual. Can’t trust that fellow a yard.”

“ Don’t worry, old sober-sides,” said his brother, as he handed over charge to him. “ I’ve raked in the shekels, and I’ve given them a real dose of innocent fun and merriment. Not so refined as yours, perhaps, but a darned sight better. They touch the spot, I tell you. Bless you, man, I’ve been touching spots by the thousand since you left your measley old show in my capable hands.”

The sports and competitions were over. People were beginning to go, but as the fun in the meadow had ceased the crowd from there gathered round the stalls and gave the place the appearance of being fuller than ever. At six o'clock, amidst great applause, the Vicar announced that from a rough calculation submitted to him by the committee it was evident that the sum hoped for would be far exceeded.

Most of the stalls were now quite sold out, the last fortune had been told, and John was helping the committee to dismantle the various erections.

At a signal from the Vicar the band played "God Save the King," and leave-taking became general.

With the exception of the Campbells, Major Robertson, and a few friends, who remained to chat with the Carfords, the grounds were soon deserted.

"I am indeed grateful to you, your husband, and all your party, Lady Campbell," said the Vicar, "for all you have done to make the day the great success it has been. I am very glad that we have raised more money than we actually asked for, though not more than we need. But honestly I do put that in a second place. Even on behalf of my beloved church I fear I am not as mercenary as I ought to be. What I wanted principally to see was just the gathering together of all our people of all classes in friendly intercourse, and enjoying themselves in a simple, decent way. And from that point of view the success has been far greater than just the financial gain. Your competitions, Aubrey, and Sinclair's sports, were quite splendid, I hear, and that's just the sort of thing we want to encourage. That nice young fellow, John Cole, did very well with his Art Gallery,

and did enough work for six in helping with the preparations."

Aubrey, who was about to say good-bye, did not seem to appreciate being included in the same category with John Cole, and could not refrain from offering a protest.

"Sinclair and I have been pottering about all the afternoon," he said, "and we're off to take a turn round before dinner, to get the stiffness out of our knees. So good-night, Vicar. I'm glad we were able to help, and it was really quite good fun. As for that Art Gallery business, I'm glad you appreciated Mr. Cole's efforts. We both thought him a most dreadful bounder."

The Vicar was rather hurt at this uncompromising verdict, but discussion was not possible as the two young men, without waiting to hear anything further on the subject, had already started down the drive at a five-mile-an-hour pace.

The remaining guests left shortly afterwards, and the committee appeared with their corrected accounts. Total net profit on the day's undertaking, £179 15s. 4d., less a few outstanding expenses which would be well within £5.

After thanking them and bidding them good-night, Mr. Carford strolled round the grounds with his wife. "We may thank God for a very happy day indeed," he said; "wonderful weather, and such pleasant people. I really can't understand those young fellows' dislike to John Cole. As far as I can see, no one could tell the difference between him and any of our ordinary public-school boys. I've never seen anything about him to suggest in the least way the attribute of 'bounder.'"

“Aubrey is a good fellow, too, and would never speak so fiercely about him on the purely snobbish grounds of social differences. I’m sorry. Let’s go in now. Dinner will soon be ready, and I think we had better put all further thoughts of to-day’s happy events out of our minds. After doing things and thinking things in connection with the great event for the last fourteen days, it’ll be getting on our nerves if we don’t turn off the tap.”

At the Campbells’ dinner table there were lots of amusing tales to be told. Not having had to endure the worries of previous preparation, they found great amusement in discussing the events of the day.

Aubrey had side-splitting incidents to relate concerning the sports, and the girls had had many adventures at their stalls. Mary was very amusing about the serious way in which people took her amateur efforts at fortune-telling—hints concerning the jealous rivalry of two rich ladies, one dark, the other fair, for the hand of a young farmer, had sent that young man away absolutely beaming. Gloomy warnings concerning a handsome villain who was fated to cross her path had quite terrified one of the maids from the Plough Inn, so much so that Mary had felt obliged to throw in without extra charge a wealthy lover who would save her from the dark man’s clutches if she remembered the warning when the time came, and kept the villain at arms’ length.

Lady Campbell had been to see the Art Gallery and had thought it cleverly done, and very amusing. She thought that young Mr. Cole had run it very well, and was surprised and pleased to find him quite a nice refined young man.

"Mother, how can you?" broke in Aubrey. "We've christened him 'The Bounder.' Sinclair and I agreed we had never seen a worse specimen."

"All right, Aubrey, you are welcome to your own opinions. I certainly don't want to discuss him with you or anyone else. I am sure the Coles are estimable people, but I am literally tired to death of hearing their name mentioned. I suppose it's their business training that makes them bob up everywhere. Even at tea we were besieged by the Cole family, and the Vicar couldn't wind up the happy day without a sort of 'mention in despatches' for them all."

At Fir Grove also conversation ran on the same lines. "You're looking tired, Harriet," said Mr. Cole after supper. "I think you'd better get to bed, and stay there all to-morrow. We don't want to have you laid up again like you were last year. You will do too much. You might have taken to-day easily in a comfortable chair listening to the band, instead of which you were on your feet all the time, watching the sports and almost wanting to compete yourself, I believe."

"Yes, I'm tired, but I'm very happy, and I feel quite well. I haven't enjoyed anything so much since we left Lancashire; everybody **was** nice to us. Lady Campbell at tea was as pleasant as could be, and said she hoped we were comfortable in our smart-looking house. So many people, too, said kind things about John's Treasure Hunt and Art Gallery. Altogether, I think we may feel it's been a very jolly day."

"Yes, it wasn't a bad show," said Percy, "not half as dull as I thought it would be. I had quite a gay time down at the sports, but as for old John's

show, if you heard anything nice about it, it's probably due to me. I made it fizz, I can tell you. Took more money in an hour than he would have in a week. These old yokels can enjoy a joke. Laughed fit to split their sides. One old dame called me a 'queer card,' which she obviously meant for an A1, tip-top compliment. Percy's motto is 'Always merry and bright,' and I'm sure I lived up to it in that one short, sweet hour."

John had a feeling of gratitude towards Percy. He so seldom did anything to help that it really was nice of him to run the show for an hour. He had probably been wrong to think that Percy might overdo the comic business.

"Thanks, awfully, old man," he said, "you did much better than I did, I'm sure. I'll always remember the way you've helped me to-day."

John's slumbers that night were not disturbed by the knowledge that Percy's kind assistance had earned him the nickname of "The Bounder."

Where ignorance is bliss. . . . Poor John !

CHAPTER V

IN the spring of the following year there was trouble in the Cole family, and both Henry and John were summoned in consultation.

Just when it was hoped that Percy might settle down to work and do something to justify his existence, he had suddenly taken a turn for the worse and, after a furious outburst against the tyranny and interference of his "pious parents," had gone off no one knew where. If he had been a few years younger one would have used the expression "run away," but at twenty-one years of age he was no longer a boy, and was free to betake himself whither he would.

But the parents were naturally anxious. With a disposition like his anything might happen, and something had to be done to find out where he was and what he was doing, and to give him another chance of making a fair start in life.

The row had begun over a reprimand administered by his father on account of his dissolute habits. He had taken to frequenting the village pub and had come home on two occasions the worse for drink. Then there was some trouble in regard to a girl in the village whose father had had a stormy interview with Mr. Cole.

After the interview Percy was arraigned. His mother implored him to promise good behaviour for the future, and his father, in his wrath, told him

to stop his drinking and his general disgraceful behaviour, or to get out of the house and never show his face again.

Fathers often say that sort of thing without meaning it in an exactly literal sense—it's a stock phrase of angry fathers. But Percy took it quite literally, and after hurling a last insult at the family, walked out of the house and had never been seen again. "I don't care a brass farthing for all your preaching and sermonising," he said. "I'm not a kid to be told any longer what I'm to do and what I'm not to do. Because Henry is such a pious sort of bloke, and John such an immaculate ass, I'm sworn at for having the usual faults of my age. Wine and women are more in my line than preaching and praying, and as you're all a jolly sight too good for me, I'll get out of the house and thank God to be out of it."

He had packed a suit-case and gone off the same afternoon while they were all out, leaving a note in which he said that he had no intention of letting them know where he was or what he was doing. He knew of half a dozen jobs he could get, and if it came to wanting money, his parents were the last people he would ask for it.

Mr. Cole was naturally shocked at his son's behaviour. Mrs. Cole had made herself quite ill over it. In her heart of hearts she had always loved Percy the best, possibly because of his iniquities, feeling that he had most need of her love.

Percy's flight had taken place a fortnight ago, and Mr. Cole was at his wits' end what to do about it. Henry's opinion was that he was a worthless young cub and the family were well rid of him. John did

not agree. He believed there was good somewhere in every human being if you could only cut away the weeds and let the good come to the surface, but he had no advice to offer on what was best to be done at the moment except to beg his parents to leave matters in his hands, and not to worry. He would find out where Percy was and try to keep him on the straight line.

In a couple of days Henry had to get back to business, but John said he would stay on till things were settled one way or another. There was no use in taking things with a rush ; in the meantime he could correspond with friends of Percy's, who might be able to throw some light on his whereabouts, and he could always run up to London for a day if necessary.

Duty and inclination seldom coincide, but they certainly did in this case. He was always a good worker, and an asset to the firm, but his heart was not in the business, and Hurstcombe in spring-time was much more to his taste than the dingy surroundings of cotton mills.

He spent a good deal of his time walking on the moor, motoring till he got to a good centre and then sending the car round to meet him at a distant spot. He was a good deal at the Vicarage, and in the village also, finding time to help in different ways, and to take part in a grand concert organised by Mr. Prenter.

On two occasions he spent a day in London, but returned without anything to report beyond the fact that someone had seen Percy in London a few days ago. This was good news, at any rate, for his mother, who had begun to brood over the affair and to dream

of the awful possibility of Percy doing away with himself.

One afternoon John met with a minor adventure of a rather disagreeable nature.

Old Mrs. Biddlecombe, who occupied one of the rooms in the Alms-houses, was a great friend of his, with whom he often stopped for a chat when passing through the village. She was a widow, childless, and bestowing all her affection on a fat and faithful fox-terrier, known by the name of Timothy.

On this particular afternoon John was on his way to the Post Office when he heard the agonised howls of a dog, and on turning the corner beyond the Alms-houses, found himself confronted by a half-drunken lout, Tom Westaway, who was holding the dog by a string and kicking it violently in the ribs. Mrs. Biddlecombe generally kept Tim tied up to the bench outside her door, his string had obviously come untied and he had wandered off on his own to seek adventure in the village. And he had apparently got more than he wanted.

He had barked and shown his teeth at Tom as he reeled by, and Tom had grabbed the string and proposed to teach him better manners by kicking him to death.

John was always a lover of animals, but even if he had not been he would have felt compelled to remonstrate.

"You leave me alone," roared Tom; "'t isn't your bloody dog, anyway. He'd a bit my leg through if I hadn't stopped him."

"Never mind," said John, "let me have the string and I'll take him home. He's had more punishment

than he deserves, and its cowardly to kick a dog like that."

"Cowardly, is it?" retorted the bully. "Who the hell are you to teach me manners? I'll treat you the same as I treat the dog if you get in my way," and with this he let out again and caught poor Tim another kick in the ribs.

Seeing that talking was no use John made a grab at the string, jerking it out of Westaway's hand and leaving Tim free to run yelping home.

Tom, blind with fury, turned to John with his fists. John was no great fighter, but he knew how to put up his fists and he was strong and athletic. He was no match, however, in strength or weight for his adversary, who was a fighter of some repute in the village, but Tom was handicapped by the liquor he had taken, and John, after going down twice and bobbing up smiling each time, eventually secured the victory, leaving the defeated bully on the ground to be attended to by the crowd, who had gathered round to see the sport.

Mrs. Cole was terribly upset by John's appearance on his return home, and he was obliged to give a brief account of what had taken place. He would have preferred to have said nothing about it, but a black eye and a bleeding nose have to be explained to a mother.

He decided in any case that, as far as he was concerned, the matter should go no farther. He had no desire to appear in court as plaintiff in an assault case, nor did he particularly wish to see Tom fined or sent to jail. In a few days he had dismissed the incident from his mind.

But news spreads rapidly in a small community,

and garbled accounts of the affair were soon known to all the inhabitants of Hurstcombe.

In the village most of the people, with the exception of Westaway's boon companions, thought a good deal of Mr. Cole for standing up to the bully, and were heartily glad that Tom had learnt a lesson. At Highfields they heard the tale in a somewhat different form. The Bounder had got mixed up in some drunken brawl in the village. Nothing surprising in that. The same version reached Upton Green where Sinclair commented: "This fellow really is the limit. Why the blazes do these northern terrors invade Hurstcombe?"

They did not want to know the details of this sordid affair. It was sufficient to understand that it was connected with drunkenness and old Mrs. Biddlecombe's dog.

The Highfields family also had their troubles. Gwendoline had been abroad now for eighteen months and they were expecting to hear about her arrangements for returning home, when Lady Campbell was distressed to get a letter from her saying that she was engaged to be married to a Mr. Prendergast, of the Indian Forest Department, whom she had met in Kashmir, and asking for the parental blessing. She was sorry not to have been able to ask for their formal approval before becoming engaged, but letters from India took such a long time. She was quite sure that they would approve of Richard if they could see him, and she gave a detailed list of his many charms and virtues. But what interested Lady Campbell most was the remark that he was related to the Prendergasts of Chorley Manor in Somerset, so that they need not be afraid of his not

being a presentable sort of person. The letter went on to say that she could not possibly come home now the hot weather was beginning, the heat made travelling in the plains intolerable from April to October, and the Red Sea was even worse. She did not believe in long engagements so, under the circumstances, she hoped her mother would agree to her being married in two months' time. Richard's leave was due to him in the autumn and they would travel home together in time for Christmas.

Lady Campbell knew her daughter well enough to understand that what she meant was : " We are going to be married in two months' time whether you like it or not." So there was nothing to do but to give in with a good grace and pretend everything was just as she would have wished.

But the family were very upset about it. Sir Clarence had had other views for his eldest daughter. And who was this nonentity she was going to marry ? A relative of the Prendergasts of Chorley, but what's that got to do with it ? The question is : how near a relative and what sort of a person ? If you're going to accept people on their merits as " relatives " of known people you'll include half the world. There's hardly a well-known family that hasn't got relatives who are pawnbrokers or goodness knows what. He was very angry indeed about it, but there was nothing to be done.

In June they got a cable telling them that the wedding had been fixed for the last Thursday in July, and on that day Gwendoline duly became Mrs. Prendergast.

Aubrey, too, wasn't going on quite as he ought to. Mr. Kenilworth was satisfied with the way in which

he carried out his actual duties, but he told Sir Clarence that he had so far detected no signs of real interest in political work. He enjoyed life thoroughly and was very popular in society, but had given no hint of any ambition.

The Mandersfields were anxious in the same way about Sinclair. He didn't seem to be doing any work at Cambridge. Nobody ever does much work in their first year, apparently, but they heard that Sinclair wasn't doing any at all. As a matter of fact, both Aubrey and he were very ordinary young men, about up to the average of their age and class. But it's a dreadful thing being an only son. If they had each been one of six sons in their respective families, they would easily have passed muster, but as only sons they were expected to fulfil the concentrated ambitions of their parents. Parents with only sons seem to expect in them some counterbalance to their own mediocrity, and are disappointed when, in nine cases out of ten, they find that mediocrity merely intensified.

Beatrice, on the other hand, was doing very well. She was undoubtedly clever, and might well make a career for herself. But she had no intention of doing anything of the sort. She liked learning and was very happy at school, but her last report described her as "wilful and obstinate," which really meant that at the age of fourteen she had a very strong character, with pronounced opinions of her own.

Her godfather, Major Robertson, rather appreciated her independent spirit, and she generally fled to him for protection and sympathy when she had received a parental lecture. It is so easy to be

nice and sympathetic when you have no responsibility.

He had been laid up with a return of some Indian ailment in the early part of August, and on a Sunday afternoon at the end of the month Colonel Mandersfield suggested to Beatrice that they should walk over to Bothwell to see how he was, and cheer him up. They found him up and about, but a little shaky after a week in bed. He was pottering round his chicken runs when he caught sight of them, and as he came forward to greet them Beatrice asked him to show them round.

“Mother and father have been asking me to choose a career ! I have promised to think it over when I’m eighteen, but they say I must choose *now*. I don’t want a career, but to please them I’ll be a poultry-farmer. So there, the choice is made, and you shall teach me how to farm chickens.”

“I expect that will hardly satisfy their ambitions, but if that is your choice I can teach you all about it in five minutes. So many eggs, less a few bad ’uns, equal so many chickens ; so many chickens of a certain age cost you so much to produce. Deduct the cost of production and upkeep from the price you get, and the balance is profit. If the balance is the other way the result is a loss. Whether there is profit or loss, they are pretty things, and very interesting, though you mightn’t think it. I’m afraid I wouldn’t often have a new suit of clothes if I depended on my chickens for it, but still I find that, by doing most of the work myself and working from dawn to dusk, I have a slight balance in my favour.”

“Oh, that’ll suit me nicely,” said Beatrice. “I’m not a money-grubber. Father and mother would be

quite satisfied if they could speak of me as the producer of a certain breed of poultry. But I couldn't do that dawn-to-dusk business at any price."

"Then poultry farming won't do for you. Come along and see the fruit ; perhaps that will be more in your line."

The orchards were duly examined, and Beatrice thought she had never seen anything so beautiful, but she could never bring herself to look on such lovely things from a money point of view. So that wouldn't do for a career, either.

They admired the soldierly precision of the whole establishment. Fruit trees and vegetables are always grown in lines at fixed intervals, and it was quite likely this that constituted their principal charm for the old soldier, but surely the intervals between individual trees and the distances between lines had never been quite so exact as his were. They looked like battalions on parade awaiting the word of command to advance, retire, or wheel to the left or right.

In the potting sheds the same order prevailed except as regards pots and mould that were actually required for the day's work. The tool shed and the workshop were equally under the spell of discipline and smartness. In the latter the chisels and other tools, shining like silver, were arranged in the most perfect order—tallest on the right, shortest on the left.

After completing the round of inspection, Major Robertson suggested tea. "All my people go out on Sunday afternoons," he said, "and I look after myself. To-day it would be a real treat if Beatrice looked after us. Do you think you could manage ?

I think you'll find everything put ready on a tray in the kitchen, and the kettle on the range ready to be boiled up when required."

"Of course I'd love to," she assented, "and I'll pry into all the cupboards and see if I can invent any surprises for you," and she darted off to the house, delighted to get something to do on her own. At home she always felt her mother treated her rather like a baby, and she was apparently not thought fit to be entrusted with even minor responsibilities.

The two men threw themselves into garden chairs under the shade of an old hawthorn, and proceeded to light their pipes.

"I'm glad you're pulling round again, Tom," said the Colonel, "but I wish you'd see a specialist. I daresay it's old malaria at the bottom of your troubles, but it may be anything else. Catherine always attributes her ailments to that, but with her I think it's just a way she's got into. If she got a fly in her eye I believe she'd blame malaria for it."

"Thanks. I'll think about it, but I hate worry, and I don't care for doctors. I've seen a good many of them and so few seem to have the power of guessing. They always ask me what's the matter with me, whereas that's just what I want them to tell me. I can tell them of the location of any aches and pains, but I want them to tell me what they are due to. I suppose if I could guess for myself and tell them what my disease was, they'd ask me what treatment I thought would be good for it."

"Oh, come, they're not all as bad as that. Let me take you to a specialist I know, a first-rate man?"

"No, thanks. Specialists are even worse. Each of them keeps a little pet disease, and they mentally

inoculate you with that disease the moment they set eyes on you. But tell me about Beatrice. What's all this about a career ? I'm not at all sure that I like the idea of careers for women, and you surely aren't worrying her about that so soon, are you ? Why, she's little more than a baby."

"Yes, it's true we have talked about it. I don't agree with you about careers for women. It's all the go nowadays and I like the idea. As for her being only a baby, I assure you she's a very grown-up person indeed. She's got ideas and a temperament far beyond her age. She's always been a great reader. I started her on Dickens, whom she liked, then Walter Scott, whom she admired, but wouldn't take to. She said he didn't move fast enough for her. Now I find she reads nothing but the most up-to-date novels, and they fill her head with the wildest notions. We get a parcel of books from Brown & Smith every fortnight, and they're left lying about. I never noticed that she had got into the habit of going through the lot of them until she suddenly gave expression to some extraordinary theory on the subject of woman's independence, and then she told me she'd always read all the books except the dull ones. Brown & Smith can be trusted to send nothing that is really objectionable, but still in these days things are discussed in books in a way they never were when we were schoolboys.

"I don't believe in forbidding things if it can be helped, or I would have forbidden her to read any more of that class of literature, and as she really is a good girl I think she would have obeyed. But I'm sure that's a wrong line, so I just hedged, and shoved away the ones I thought it better for her not to read,

and left the nice books ostentatiously around. But that didn't work. So that's how it stands."

"I follow exactly, and if I had any godfatherly advice to give, I'd give it. But I can only say I believe you are right to leave her alone. She's the kind that can be guided, but she'd never be driven, and I don't think her reading will bring her to much harm."

"I wanted you to know about our wish for her to take up some career, because we have always taken you rather seriously as a godfather. We have neither of us any near relations, and if anything happened to either or both of us—not likely to, but might be any day—you might find your share of the responsibility seriously increased."

"I'm glad you look on it like that. There's not much likelihood of my coming into that position of responsibility, but you know I love her as if she were my own and she can rely on me as long as I live."

Loud bangs on a gong and cries of "Tea ready" put a close to the conversation and the two men walked towards the house, but were stopped at the door by Beatrice. "Not inside. Bright idea. Let's have it out on the lawn. May we?"

"Of course," said Major Robertson. "I never go in if I can help it. Only on Sunday, when they're all out, I don't bother about pulling the things out for myself."

"Come along and help, then," said Beatrice. "You catch hold of the other side of the table and father can bring the cakes and bread-and-butter."

It was delightful sitting in a shady corner of the lawn, and the hot afternoon made the thought of a cup of tea very welcome.

"May I do the pouring out and all that ?" asked Beatrice. "You needn't be afraid for your nice tea-cloth. I shan't splosh anything around."

"Certainly, you shall do all the hard work, and we'll even allow you to wait on us. All we want is to lie back in comfy chairs, drink our tea, and criticise you."

"I don't mind criticism. I'm accustomed to it. But grown-ups are so beastly unfair. Lots of criticism for your benefit, but if you try it on them, they get cross and rude and say chestnuttty things about 'children should be seen and not heard,' and so on. Does godfather take sugar ? One lump or two ?"

A very pleasant tea-party and a few surprises. Funny little sandwiches made of goodness knows what, but tasting very nice, and quite a novel invention—hot buttered toast with jam on it.

The latter really was a genuine surprise and the Colonel shied at it, but Major Robertson, always undaunted, swallowed several slices and pronounced them very good. Colonel Mandersfield, cross-examined by his daughter, sought refuge in the excuse that he wasn't hungry. That excuse being rejected, he boldly declared that the mixture was unusual and would upset his digestion.

"It's horrid of you, father," protested Beatrice. "Just a fixed idea you've got. People eat jam omelettes, don't they ? And that's pretty well the same thing."

When they left, Major Robertson accompanied them as far as the gate and waved good-bye as they turned the corner of the road in the direction of Upton Green.

"He *is* a dear, isn't he, dad ?" said Beatrice, as

they talked over the afternoon. "I think those hot-buttered-jam-toast creations of mine were just dreadful, and he ate three of them. A braver man than you !"

"Yes, I expect he's that, all right, but you'd find him a strict father. Fancy how he'd drill you and make you form squares and advance in extended order."

"I shouldn't mind that a bit, because I know he'd balance it by spoiling me, and that's what you never do."

"Nonsense. Only a spoilt child would say such undutiful things. And just when I was contemplating a very great treat for you."

"A real treat for me ! Oh, you dear, delightful daddie. Now do get ahead and spoil me properly. What's it going to be ?"

"I have to go to London on business in September. Your mother is not up to coming with me, but she thought you might come and look after your poor old father. Would you like it ?"

"Oh, dad, how truly delightful ! London and theatres. A theatre every night for a week at least."

"Go easy, please, over the theatre arrangements. I daresay we'll manage two or three, and you shall choose the plays yourself. Now, if you're not a spoilt child, I don't know who is."

Beatrice was tremendously excited over the prospect of a week in London, and immediately they got in she threw herself into her mother's arms and hugged her for sheer joy. "Oh, you dear, sweet mumkins," she cooed, "to think of such a heavenly treat for me. But we shan't like leaving you here all alone."

“ You needn’t worry about me,” said her mother. “ I daresay Sinclair will be here part of the time. But I shall be a little anxious about your behaviour. You are such a wild little thing. You’ll have to promise me to be as good as gold.”

A few days later Peggy came over from Highfields and took Beatrice off for a ride. They were up on the moor till late in the afternoon, and got back to Highfields panting for cups of hot tea. Mary and Isabel were at home, very excited over the prospect of a visit to Scotland. They were leaving in two days’ time, and would only return in time to pack up and get back to work. Aubrey was in London, supposed to be very busy. He was to leave England shortly, accompanying Mr. Kenilworth to Berlin. There was such a lot of talk about the Germans ; half the public men you met and who were people who ought to know, believed that they were a delightful, peace-loving nation, only keeping up large armaments to protect themselves from their wicked neighbours, and the other half thought just the other way, while Lord Roberts lost no opportunity of warning England that Germany’s intentions were the reverse of pacific, and that the Kaiser was pledged to a policy of world-conquest.

So Mr. Kenilworth thought he’d go and form his own impressions, and Aubrey was to go with him. The girls rather envied their brother. “ Men seem to get all the treats,” said Isabel. “ I wish I were a man.”

“ I don’t—a bit,” said Beatrice, surprising them with her vehemence. “ I believe we could have just as good a time or better if we didn’t allow ourselves to be sat on so easily.”

"Hurrah for Beatrice," shouted Peggy, "and hurrah for the revolution, my brave sisters, and down with Man !"

"Don't be funny, Peggy," said Mary quietly ; "there's a good deal in what she says, and if women have a grievance, I really believe it's mostly their own fault. However, it's getting late, and this debate is hereby closed. You'd better get the car and drive Beatrice home, or they'll be wondering what has become of her."

Peggy's latest triumph was to be allowed to drive the car herself. Her mother thought she was too careless to be trusted with a car, but she had proved herself a very reliable driver. They certainly travelled at a high speed, but Peggy did not try to show off or do anything silly and Beatrice was safely deposited at Upton Green in time to dress for dinner.

Lady Campbell was going to London to see Aubrey off, staying with friends in Lancaster Gate, and she travelled up with the Mandersfields on the first of September. Colonel Mandersfield always stayed at the Carlton to be near his club. He was so seldom in London that when he was there he greatly enjoyed the opportunity of meeting old cronies and talking over soldiering days. He was not at all a club man, and never felt really happy away from the country, but a few days in London now and then were very enjoyable and served to keep up old ties of comradeship that it would be sad to break.

Lady Campbell would have charge of Beatrice most of the day, so that he would be quite free, and the evenings were to be devoted to various forms of gaiety.

This arrangement suited Beatrice admirably. However much she loved her father, her idea of a nice time in London was not likely to be the same as his. It would be a good deal livelier and more interesting to see all the big shops and drive in the Park than to potter about the City with father in the morning and do the British Museum or something equally improving in the afternoon.

Aubrey came over to see them the morning after they arrived, looking very smart and handsome. He told them of the plans for the German trip. They might be away only for two months, but Mr. Kenilworth was a very thorough man, and if he got interested in a subject he wouldn't drop it till he had turned it inside out. Personally, Aubrey thought two months in Germany was as much as he cared about, and if his chief showed signs of developing too fierce an enthusiasm, he'd do his best to quench his ardour.

As for feeding, fancy living for more than two months on sausages and sauerkraut ! And the Germans themselves, heavy, boorish people, with big moustaches, hats with peaks, and soft, puffy tops, and smoking big pipes with china bowls—funny enough to look at, but impossible to live amongst.

“ Nonsense, Aubrey, you silly old thing. Don't try to pull my leg ; you know the Germans better than that,” said Beatrice. “ I don't believe they're a bit different to the English. They are sort of cousins of ours, aren't they ? Anyway, we have one German girl at school. She is very pretty and nice, and you couldn't tell her from an English girl. She doesn't look in the least as if she even knew how to eat a sausage.”

Colonel Mandersfield said he thought Germans were probably very much like other people. Some of them beastly, and some of them delightful. The goodness or badness of a nation, if one could speak of a nation as a whole, was simply a matter of whether there were more of the bad 'uns or more of the good 'uns. He asked Aubrey when he was off.

"We leave on Friday morning," replied Aubrey, "and I want to have a great jollification before I go. I've got a box at Morley's, and you're both to come and dine with me at Prince's, go on to the theatre and end up with a nice little supper somewhere or another. Mother's coming, of course, and she's bringing Jack Maynard and his sister. Six will be a frightful squash in a box, but three of you will be able to see nicely and three of us won't be worrying much about it. That's always the way, you know, in boxes. I've seen the play before, and so has Jack. We like the music and the pretty young things on the stage, but we shan't be scrambling for the front seats, so you'll do all right."

"I'm sure it will be lovely," said Beatrice. "I don't care much about dinners and suppers, but I've got quite a decent appetite as you know, and if there are ices I shall ask for nothing else."

"I'll see to the ices. Major Robertson won't be there with his health rules to warn you they're not good for you, and you shall have as many as you can manage."

"I thought I'd take Beatrice down to Richmond to-morrow afternoon if you will let me," he continued, turning to the Colonel. "We'll have tea there and I might show her a bit of the river. No risks; I won't drown her."

"Of course she can go, Aubrey," said her father. "But you're spoiling her. Little schoolgirls don't often get smart young men to take them about. She'll be getting above herself."

"Fathers always say horrid, snubby things," retorted Beatrice, "but I don't mind a bit. I *am* a schoolgirl, and I don't often get treats. That's true enough, anyway."

Aubrey said good-bye, after arranging to call for her and drive her down.

The next two days were filled with many excitements, and the trip to Richmond was unadulterated bliss. It was a hot, sunny day and the river was at its best. Aubrey could do many things well in the way of sports, and his skilful management of a punt delighted Beatrice. She appreciated his smartness, too. It was really very nice to be taken about by this distinguished-looking young man, and Aubrey, like most men of his type, looked his best in flannels.

The dinner-party at Prince's on Thursday was a lively affair. Jack Maynard sat by Beatrice and never once said anything nasty about schoolgirls, which made her feel exceptionally cheerful. His sister Dora was a young lady with all her wits about her, and she got a good deal of amusement out of Aubrey's attempts at pomposity.

"You may or may not learn lots of things at Oxford," she said in reply to one of his rather dogmatic assertions, "but there's plenty you don't learn. Why did the duck duck? Is a sponge vegetable, animal, or mineral? Can monkeys swim?"

"I know the answer to all those questions," he

said, "but really I'm not out to start an infants' class of instruction. Time to be on the move, I think, mother," he added. "I can take you all in my car if you like, but I'll get a taxi as well if you think we'd be too crowded."

Lady Campbell thought six in a car an unpleasant squash. She said she would take a taxi with Colonel Mandersfield and Jack, while Aubrey took Beatrice and Dora with him in the car.

As the car stopped at the door of the theatre Aubrey jumped out and assisted the two girls to alight. They crossed the pavement to the entrance door where a flower girl offered some faded roses for sale. They always call them flower-girls, but it was a long time since this one had been a girl, and she looked unprepossessing. "Buy a few flowers for the ladies, sir." Aubrey pushed on without taking notice, but she dodged in front of him again, holding out her flowers. "'Aven't sold a bunch this evening sir, and I'll never get the money I paid for 'em. Two nice bunches for eighteenpence."

"Bother the woman," said Aubrey; "why do the police allow them to worry people? Get out of the light," he added, as he pushed past her. "Come along inside, Dora, and sit down; we'll have to wait a minute or two for mother. Here's a beautiful crimson plush settee with just room on it for you and Beatrice."

"I don't want to sit down, thanks," said Beatrice. "How could you be so horrid to that miserable-looking woman who wanted to sell you some flowers? I want some of those roses badly and so does Dora. I think you might have asked us. Get some, please, we really *do* want them."

“ Encouraging beggars,” said Aubrey, as he returned with two bunches. “ Silly sentimental nonsense.”

Beatrice was feeling quite angry and wanted to argue that it probably wasn't their fault they had to try and get a little money that way, and in any case it must be rotten luck to be a beggar of any sort, but the arrival of the remainder of the party fortunately put a stop to further discussion. But the cross feeling remained—not in any way visible, or affecting her enjoyment, but just a little sort of sore sensation at the back of her mind, almost unnoticeable even to herself.

She liked the play immensely, sitting in front with Lady Campbell and Dora. She was quite sure she had never enjoyed herself so much. The luxurious comfort of the box, the pleasing outlook over smartly-dressed women in the stalls and occupants of other boxes, who examined people rather impertinently she thought, through lorgnettes and opera glasses. Lorgnettes were especially riling, making the person looked at feel as if they were some horrid insect, undergoing a process of identification. The catchy music, the splendid costumes, the pretty girls and handsome hero, and, last but not least, the play itself.

It was fearfully exciting, all about some place in the Balkans, where all the men wore a sort of beautiful Hussar uniform with tight, embroidered breeches and neat-fitting top boots. In this land there was some trouble about the succession to the throne. It was rather muddling trying to follow what it was all about, but apparently several people had been changed at birth, several bore an extraordinary re-

semblance to others that enabled them to pass themselves off as people they weren't, and there had been several assassinations. The audience were allowed to understand that the hero was the rightful heir to the throne, but it was difficult to get the necessary evidence to prove his title. There were so many bad men, and sinister, seductive women, that he seemed to have a poor chance, especially as he was extremely susceptible, and was constantly dancing with ladies of ravishing beauty who, he ought to have known, were merely trying to lead him to his doom in order to secure the throne for some other person. There was some wonderful document, and the rules of the game were that whoever got hold of this document would be crowned king. A simple affair. Beatrice followed the fortunes of the hero and heroine with intense anxiety and applauded with vigour when in the last act the comic royal gardener secured the document and handed it over to the triumphant hero.

"Simply ripping," she said to Aubrey as they left the theatre, "you really have given me the best treat I ever had."

Dora was rather more sophisticated and her opinion was that it was very pretty but rather silly.

They waited on the steps while Aubrey and a magnificent commissioner got the car and a taxi. The party divided as before, and Aubrey saw Lady Campbell off in the taxi. As he returned across the crowded pavement to pick up the two girls a young man in a lounge suit with an adoring young female clinging to his arm, bumped into him and passed on with a curt apology: "Pardon, my fault."

"Confound that young cub," said Aubrey, as he

reached the steps ; “ half-drunk, I should think. Come on, girls, the car’s ready ; we’ll have to bustle or we’ll keep the others waiting.”

As the car drove off Beatrice said : “ That young man certainly did look a bit flushed. I only caught a glimpse of him, but I seemed to know his face. And the very pretty girl, too, I seemed to have seen her before. Imagination, I suppose, as they aren’t Hurstcombe people and I hardly know anyone outside the village.”

Aubrey muttered something rather rudely about “ Tommy-rot,” and Dora was going to say something about manners, when they arrived at the Trocadero.

Lady Campbell, with the others, had already gone on to the table that had been reserved, and Aubrey ushered his party in to the strains of the “ Merry Widow Waltz,” which the band were performing as they entered.

The four young people enjoyed themselves tremendously, but there was an inclination to yawn on the part of the elders.

In half an hour’s time Lady Campbell, prompted by a secret sign from Colonel Mandersfield, announced her intention of going home, and in preparing to say good-night, suggested that Beatrice, too, had better be taking her father home.

It was a tactful way of putting it, and made it difficult for Beatrice to argue. What Lady Campbell meant was that children of Beatrice’s age ought to have been in bed an hour ago, but as the departure was based on the senility of her father, there wasn’t a word to be said.

“ Good-night and good-bye, and thank you ever

so much, Aubrey," said Beatrice. "I do hope you'll have a jolly time in Germany, and learn to eat sausages nicely."

Aubrey saw them off to their taxi and returned to his remaining guests to finish a joyous evening.

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At the door of a prosperous-looking boarding-house in Bayswater, the young man who had bumped into Aubrey outside the theatre was taking leave of his "girl."

"Good-night, Rose," he said ; "we've had a jolly evening, but you're such a prude. What do you want to get in so early for ? I'll keep you out till two o'clock next time."

"Oh, no, Percy, mother wouldn't allow that. Besides, I really can't come out at all if you drink so much. You nearly knocked that young man down outside the theatre."

"Wish I had," he replied. "D'you know who it was ? No ? Well you've seen him before. It was that stuck-up ass, Aubrey Campbell, from Hurstcombe."

"I didn't notice him at all just now. But I remember Mr. Aubrey last year when I was helping my aunt with her stall at the Vicarage 'at home' at Hurstcombe."

"Bless Mrs. Prenter, darling. If she hadn't been your aunt we two might never have met. I shall never forget how sweet you looked that day. I wonder how I stopped myself from kissing you right away in front of everybody."

"Well, good-night, Percy. I mustn't stay out another minute. Mother'll be wild."

“ I hate saying good-night,” he replied crossly, “ but I’ll let you go in this time if you give me twenty kisses.”

Rose paid her ransom, and with a final wave of the hand, entered the house and closed the door.

CHAPTER VI

ROSE GARSTIN had been one of the many girls at the Vicarage fête last year who were treated to admiring ogles by the young man with the gorgeous tie. She had been staying for a few days at that time at Hurstcombe with her mother's sister, Mrs. Prenter.

Percy had met her again by chance in London, and lost no time in striking up an acquaintance. Later he called on her mother in quite the correct style, and was now engaged in "courting" her with maternal sanction. He had had no such intention in the first instance, but Rose was a wise young lady who knew pretty well how to take care of herself, and she refused to have anything to do with clandestine meetings, which were what Percy had designed. She was an extraordinarily pretty girl, and he was sufficiently infatuated with her to yield to her insistence.

Mrs. Garstin was a widow. Her husband, who had been employed in one of the big shops in Calcutta, had died three years ago of heat-stroke while travelling in India, leaving her his small savings which, with an insurance policy, amounted to about £3,000.

Arriving in London after seven years' absence, she cast about for means of making a livelihood for

herself and her daughter, and hit on the boarding-house business, for which she proved eminently fitted. She was fortunate in being able to purchase the goodwill of a business in the neighbourhood of Queen's Road, Bayswater, and after a few preliminary ups and downs, the establishment began to make its way. In two and a-half years she had secured a large clientèle of semi-permanent boarders of a good class—men in business in the city, people who lived in the country and liked to spend three or four months of the year in London, retired army officers with small pensions, and ladies of slender means, widows and spinsters no longer young, who form a large percentage of such communities all over the world.

She had also a thought for her daughter and hoped that some day a likely young man might turn up as a boarder, who would succumb to her charms and lead her to the altar. Not that she wanted to be rid of Rose, not at all. She was very fond and proud of her only child, but she had the natural motherly desire to see her well settled in life.

In this hope she had been so far disappointed. She would have liked some steady young fellow of twenty-five or thereabouts, but the average of her male boarders was more like sixty-five.

So when Percy turned up she regarded him as a heaven-sent blessing, and gladly gave permission for Rose to walk out with him. She liked his looks but didn't care much for his manners, and she wasn't at all sure how far he was to be trusted. She had not had time to inquire into his circumstances in life, but she gathered that he was in some motor business, and he seemed to be all right financially.

Rose, at any rate, knew that his people were respectable, and quite well off. Moreover, her sister at Hurstcombe knew all about them and she could write and inquire.

He was certainly too young, possibly younger than Rose, but one can't have everything one wants.

As regards trusting him, she did not see any great risk. Rose was not an emotional girl ; she had been well brought up and had a good head on her shoulders, and with a little hint now and then was quite capable of taking care of herself.

Rose wasn't quite sure herself what her feelings were towards this young man. She had never been taught to analyse her psyche, and the cult of introspection was not yet in vogue. She lived each day for the day itself, and was glad if it brought her some pleasure and distraction, but she was serious-minded, and had high ideals. In Percy she found a pleasant companion of a nature to be described as " jolly "—" a jolly good sort," " a jolly good fellow," and so on, but she hoped a longer acquaintance would show him to be possessed of other attributes than that of, being " jolly." He was kind-hearted, generous and interesting, and if her present feeling for him ever developed into love, she might find that these good qualities would outweigh his vulgarity, which jarred on her.

They had met about five months ago, a few days after Percy's flight from Fir Grove. She was just coming out of a *matinée* performance at a cinema in Edgware Road when he passed her on the pavement, and although they had only seen each other at Hurstcombe for some five minutes while he was

making purchases at Mrs. Prenter's stall, the recognition was mutual.

He turned towards her with the words, "'Scuse me, met you before, I'm sure. My name's Percy Cole. Weren't you at Hurstcombe last year?"

"Of course I was," she replied, smiling. "I remember you, too. Not only your features, but a very beautiful tie you were wearing. You bought some things at auntie's stall."

"Well, it's a bit of luck meeting you like this," he rejoined, with an arch glance of admiration. "Which way are you going? May I come along for a bit? I'm at a loose end, not going anywhere particular."

"I'm walking home along the Bayswater Road. Is that too far out of your way? I shall be glad of your company," said Rose, in a not-too-interested tone.

Percy assured her that so far from being out of his way, it was just where he wanted to go; he offered her his arm, but she took no notice and, crossing the street in a most independent manner, left him to follow by himself. He quickly regained her side, and they walked along, happily chatting, and recalling the events of the great day at Hurstcombe last year.

This first meeting had been followed by many others, until it had become quite a recognised thing for Percy to call round in the afternoon or evening and take her for a walk. She had insisted, in the first few days of the acquaintanceship, on his presenting himself to her mother. Percy reluctantly consented, as he could secure her company under no other terms.

Since then her feelings had ripened into a genuine friendship. Her life was dull, and she was glad of

the society of a presentable young man who would take her about. But anything in the way of real love had not suggested itself to her. If she had thought of it she would have smiled at the idea of this boy, a year younger than herself, proposing himself in the capacity of a husband. Yet she was not a flirt by nature, and love with her would mean something very serious. She had allowed him to go as far as kisses, without particularly desiring them. But excessive warmth in his embraces annoyed her, and she firmly refused to be led into solitary walks in unfrequented parts of the Park.

Percy, on the other hand, was frantically in love with her "in a sort of way," as he put it to himself.

Matrimony was a subject that he had scarcely thought on at all. It was the sort of thing that came about when you were between thirty and forty and had had enough of knocking around and felt you would like the comforts of a home. It never suggested itself for a moment in connection with Rose. She was just something to be loved, and kissed, and hugged. But she seemed to be irritatingly cold. Kisses she permitted, but did not return with any great enthusiasm. Anything beyond that she called "taking liberties," and she would not allow liberties to be taken with her. If Percy didn't like it, he could go and get some other girl who would be more appreciative. He certainly didn't like it, but he wanted no other girl—for the time being, at any rate.

She allowed him to take her to the picture palaces, and occasionally to a theatre, but on these occasions she insisted on paying her share of the expenses. Altogether Percy felt very unhappy. He often said to himself that he'd "chuck" Rose, but he found he

couldn't do it. It was annoying that she wouldn't even let him spend money on her.

Since leaving Fir Grove he had had a fairly good time. He had about £150 with him when he left, and a friend in London soon helped him to a job where he could earn a decent living. He had always been a good mechanic, and he found no difficulty in getting a good situation with a motor firm in the north of London. He worked well—though he disliked work—he was well paid, and could easily have lived quite decently on his salary, but he was a lavish spender, and in a short time found himself in difficulties. The result was that he had to climb down from his heroic position of refusing financial aid, and appeal to his father for an allowance, which was generously granted.

If Rose had been the sort of girl who liked handsome presents, Percy would have loved giving them to her, but she unhesitatingly refused to accept anything except occasional flowers or chocolates, and even these she tried to balance by counter presents of cigarettes, much to his annoyance.

Throughout the summer Percy stormed the citadel in vain. Rose continued to be glad of his society, but he considered it was time he was "getting a move on," and she showed no inclination at all for any further display of affection than an occasional kiss. By September he felt himself "absolutely fed up," and determined to settle the matter once for all by direct attack.

He devised a rather mean plan by which she should be irrevocably compromised and fall inevitably into his arms.

It consisted in the not very original arrangement

of a late afternoon on the river followed by a theatre and a pre-arranged taxi breakdown after the last buses and tubes had ceased to run. It was all thought out in the best melodramatic style. Rose extricated herself, however, without great difficulty, but not without threatening to speak to a policeman. It was a distinctly unpleasant affair, and resulted in Percy being permanently "warned off."

In order to save further trouble, Mrs. Garstin packed her daughter off to friends in the south of Ireland, and Percy was left disconsolate.

He wrote frantic love-letters to her Bayswater address to which he received no reply, and he failed in all his efforts to discover her whereabouts.

The firm for which he was working were taking up aeroplane work, and Percy was found to be particularly clever in dealing with the complicated light engines. He was given a free hand and a good salary, and for the first time in his life he felt some enjoyment in his work. It helped to keep his mind off Rose.

It never struck him to be angry with himself, but he was fearfully angry with her. Occasionally he got a little morbid pleasure by reading newspaper accounts of cases similar to his own, where some degenerate stripling had said to the irresponsible lady of his choice, "If you will not be mine, you will never be another's," and had then proceeded to cut her throat very thoroughly, lacking the courage to be as thorough when it came to his own turn, being arrested by the police and posing as the hero of a *crime passionnel*. But the pleasure of these perusals was spoilt by the reflection that in cold-blooded England they hang you for that sort of thing.

He had several letters from his mother asking him to come home and they would let bygones be bygones. They were glad to know he was at work and doing well, but his father had set his heart on all his boys being in the business and he wanted Percy to come into line. To these he replied that he had found a job that exactly suited him, he liked London, and hated the idea of returning to the north of England.

Mr. and Mrs. Cole were by now feeling quite settled in at Hurstcombe. They were nice people in every sense and very much liked in the village. They were naturally unhappy about Percy, and this was probably the chief cause of Mrs. Cole's breakdown in August when she was laid up for three weeks. In September they heard rumours of Percy's entanglement with some girl. Fred Saunders also wrote about the same time to say that Margaret was very seriously ill with some complaint not yet diagnosed. So they had many reasons for not feeling very cheerful.

Emily and John came down in the middle of the month to help cheer them up, but John unwittingly added to the depression of his parents when he announced his intention of applying for a commission in the Territorials, for which he had taken great pains to qualify.

His father objected strongly to any form of "militarism" on general grounds, and to anything in the nature of preparation for war on religious grounds.

As regarded the first objection, John urged that to fit oneself for defence could not be construed as militarism. It was really anti-militarism, because

unless civilians came forward in peace time to train for the possibility of a national emergency, the State would probably be compelled to introduce some form of conscription, and conscription must lead to militarism.

As regarded the second, he could not see the matter from his father's point of view.

Mr. Cole reproached him for his lack of Christian feeling in the matter. "I cannot understand you John," he said. "I often wonder if you are at heart a Christian at all."

"I hope I am, father ; in fact, I may as well say I know I am," John replied in his most decided tone. "But two Christians never hold exactly the same point of view. And it's not a matter one can argue about even with one's own father. You read the Bible one way, and I read it another. I try to live according to Christ's teaching, but I must admit that on several points, and this is one of them, I cannot feel quite certain in my own mind, what His teaching was. I really cannot find among His recorded sayings anything that would exactly mean, 'When your country is attacked you are not to lend a hand in its defence.'"

"My boy," replied his father, rising and laying his hand on his shoulder, "I always pray that God may lead you to accept the Bible as it is, and that you may not be tempted astray by the modern tendency to read into it what you want to find there. Read it again, beginning right back in the Old Testament with the Commandment, 'Thou shalt do no murder.' . . ."

John cut him short impatiently with, "Oh, come, father. I really cannot argue about it. We think

so differently on these matters. Fancy quoting to me that Commandment given to the Chosen People, who, according to their later history, appear to have spent their lives in killing people wholesale by God's command.

"I have no desire to kill people ; the Territorials are only for home defence, and there is not the least probability of their ever being called on to take part even in a war of defence. But I just like to feel that if the call came I would be ready. So sorry, father if anything I say pains you or mother, but I can't help having my own opinions in these matters."

Mr. Cole left the room grumbling about undutiful sons of modern tendencies, and John called Emily to come for a walk.

Emily was a good walker, and they set out to tramp in the direction of Newton Abbot, intending to do a six-mile round before dinner. It was a beautiful afternoon, and not uncomfortably hot. There had been a drought in August, but rain had fallen lately, giving a touch of invigorating freshness to the air and reminding them that the real summer had definitely gone, and autumn was coming.

"How sad," said Emily, as she strode along by his side, "to think that the lovely summer has gone for ever, now autumn, and then the miserable winter to endure."

"Humbug," replied John ; "they're all good, and each makes you like the other. Summer's good, autumn's good, winter's good, and spring's good. I like the summer because of the winter, and the other two half-seasons just fit into their places to make the year stick together."

They walked at a good pace, occasionally on the

road, which with its glorious, high, wasteful Devonshire hedges, was as beautiful as any bit of the country, and occasionally by paths across the fields and skirting the woods.

On the homeward trip they turned into an old narrow, deep-cut road which they had christened "Honeysuckle Lane."

Peggy Campbell had taken Beatrice for a quiet saunter that afternoon and, coming down the lane from the other end the two couples met almost before they were aware of each other's presence.

As they approached Peggy stepped forward towards Emily with a smile of recognition.

"Hullo," she said chaffingly, "here's the twin been trespassing again, I expect. Never seen you from that day to this, except in the distance. Hope you're well and keeping out of trouble."

"Thanks, I'm doing pretty well," replied Emily, "May I introduce my brother John."

John raised his hat and murmured something about it's being a nice day.

"This is Beatrice Mandersfield," continued Peggy, doing the honours of introduction. "Beatrice, the Twin. Twin, Beatrice. Likewise Mr. Cole."

After a few remarks about nothing in particular the two parties separated, and as soon as they were out of hearing Peggy exclaimed to Beatrice, "My hat ! I shall catch it for this ! D'you know who you've been talking to ?"

"Oh, yes, I've seen the person you seem to know so well as 'The Twin' often. She's one of the Cole's, I suppose. And the young man's the one they call 'The Bounder,' isn't he ? He certainly looks the part."

“What nonsense ! I never in my life saw anything less like a bounder. That doesn’t mean to say he isn’t one. I don’t know him, so I can’t tell. But in spite of Dickens and usually accepted ideas, burglars never look like burglars. Murderers, male or female, nearly always have angelic countenances, and swindlers never look like swindlers. You hear people say, ‘I never thought a man with a face like that would have swindled me,’ as if swindlers showed their evil inclinations in their faces ! You’re suffering from pre-conceived ideas, my dear. Aubrey and Sinclair call him ‘The Bounder,’ and so of course he looks like a bounder. I don’t hold any brief for Mr. Jonathan Cole, but that’s all tommy-rot. On the several occasions I have seen him, and to-day when I have met him, I have observed no tendency on his part to bound. So there !”

“You’re getting quite heated about it, Peggy,” replied Beatrice with an amused smile. “He may not be a bounder after all. Sinclair says there’s nothing against him except rather outrageous behaviour at the Vicarage garden party, and being mixed up in a ‘drunken brawl’ in the village. Don’t know, and don’t care. Doesn’t interest me, anyway. I daresay bad behaviour and drunken brawls (whatever they are) don’t make a bounder.”

Peggy declined to continue the argument on such a footling subject, and conversation fell into normal channels as they wended their way back to the village.

Emily and John also discussed the two girls whom they had just left.

“I think she’s an awfully good sort,” said Emily, smiling over the recollection of her first meeting with

Peggy. "I've only met her twice, but she strikes me as being everything that's nice and honest and loyal."

"Yes, when one takes a sudden, and perhaps unaccountable, liking to people, one generally does credit them with most of the virtues. As I had never the pleasure of meeting her before I hadn't got so far as compiling a list of her probable virtues, I just thought her adorable. I've never seen anything so absolutely fascinating in my life, and the sound of her voice was like the tinkling of silver bells."

"Goodness, John," shrieked his sister, stopping short and confronting him in the middle of the road. "Love at first sight ! If you can think that Peggy has a voice like silver bells, there's no mistaking the symptoms."

"Peggy ? Peggy ?" he muttered, as if bewildered. "Oh, I see what you mean. Of course you thought I was speaking of Miss Campbell. You naturally would. My mistake. However, it wasn't her I meant at all. I was thinking of Miss Mandersfield. And as for love at first sight, that was equally far from my thoughts. One can admire a beautiful person, I suppose, just as one can admire a beautiful picture, from a purely aesthetic point of view. Besides, one doesn't fall in love with school-girls, does one ?"

"Oh, yes, it can be done, I believe. Anyway, she's probably sixteen, at least, and mother wasn't much more than sixteen when she married father."

"I see. Is that so ?" responded John dreamily. "Yes. Well don't let's be funny about it any more. The plain fact is that though I have often seen that

girl before, in the ordinary way, in the village and so on, it is the first time I have ever actually stood face to face with her, and heard her speak. I think she is perfectly entrancing. That's all there is to it. Come along, now," he added, "we'll have to be stepping out a bit or we'll be keeping mother and father waiting for supper."

Beatrice was staying to dinner at Highfields. Aubrey was at home, having brought a friend down from London for a week. Isabel was also at home, and a very cheery party assembled at the Campbells' dinner table.

Peggy felt that her mother ought to know about the meeting that afternoon, and she thought there might be less trouble if she mixed it up in general conversation at the table.

She waited a long time for a convenient pause, and when she got her chance started her confession.

"Ripping walk we had, this afternoon," she said, not addressing her mother, but the company in general ; "we met Fir Grove out for an airing. Mr. John Cole and his sister Emily."

"How do you mean you 'met' them?" inquired Lady Campbell in her coldest tones. "You don't 'meet' people you don't know. I suppose you mean you saw them."

"Oh, no, mother, not at all. We stopped and spoke to them."

"Peggy, how can you?" said her mother, frowning. "We don't know the Coles, and you can't stop and speak to people you don't know."

"Awfully sorry, mother," replied Peggy humbly, "but I *do* know the twin lady. We met bang in the middle of the lane, and there was no way out of

it. I couldn't be so rude as to bump by them without a word, so we just passed the time of day."

Sir Clarence looked fierce and said nothing. Lady Campbell had no intention of pursuing the topic further at the dinner table, so conversation soon became general again. But not before Aubrey had made some contemptuous remark about that "dreadful young man."

Peggy knew that her mother would have something more to say about it, so she was not surprised when Lady Campbell broached the subject again to her when they were alone after breakfast on the following morning. She had a good deal to say about it, and concluded by speaking quite angrily to Peggy.

"It's not that we object to anything in particular about these people," she said, in rather a bitter tone. "In fact, we like them in a sort of way. But you must see for yourself that they are not the kind of people we would care to be mixed up with. You make things very difficult for us, by allowing your generous instincts to overcome your better sense. Besides, you know an order is an order, and I distinctly forbade you to speak to them. I shall never forgive your disobedience."

"I'm really awfully sorry, mother," replied Peggy with an air of contrition. "I'd hate to do anything you told me not to. I know exactly what you mean by these social codes, and I daresay they are quite necessary. But meeting in that way, face to face, as we did, I simply could not bring myself to cut them. They call Mr. John Cole 'The Bounder' but it seems to me that if I had done that it would have been I that was the bounder, don't you think? If

there are female bounders ? All I can say is I'm very sorry."

Lady Campbell was far from being pacified by Peggy's humility, but there was nothing to be done, and the subject was dropped.

But when Aubrey tried to come the big brother over her and take her to task for her bad behaviour, Peggy turned on him and rent him.

"Ever since that hateful trip of yours to Germany," she flung at him, "you've been absolutely overbearing. You seem to have got a touch of Prussianism in your veins. Big brothers in Prussia are very important people in the eyes of little sisters, but luckily they don't count over here."

There was probably some truth in her taunt. Mr. Kenilworth had become deeply interested in the German problem, and had stayed in Germany much longer than he originally intended, visiting most of the important centres. Aubrey, so far from protesting, as he had vowed he would do, had enjoyed himself thoroughly, mixing chiefly with diplomats and army and navy officers, who, he declared, were the best fellows in the world. They had entertained him magnificently, and were downright good sportsmen. All this talk about German hostility to England was rubbish. Mr. Kenilworth held the contrary view even more strongly, and was now engaged in letting people know what he thought of German aims and ambitions.

Aubrey returned to London a few days later, and by the end of the month Sir Clarence and Lady Campbell were alone at Highfields.

Autumn gave place to winter, and Hurstcombe settled down to a period of dullness.

In November Mr. Cole was pained to hear from John that he had got his commission in the Territorials and his name had appeared in the last *Gazette*.

Early in February, 1913, the Coles' household was thrown into mourning by the death of Margaret, Emily's twin sister. Mrs. Cole was quite overcome by grief and was gradually becoming a hopeless invalid. Mrs. Carford called frequently to see her. She missed her willing help in the many functions over which she had hitherto helped her to preside, and, apart from the very sincere affection she felt for her, she liked to ask her opinion on many small matters concerning the various unions, clubs and guilds in which they were mutually interested.

In April her condition gave rise to considerable anxiety, and Henry and John were again summoned to Fir Grove. Soon after their arrival her condition improved sufficiently to enable Henry to return to the works, but John, as usual, making his filial duty coincide with his natural tastes, stayed on.

His father was glad of his company, and it cheered his mother to have him about the house.

He spent a good deal of his time on his motor bicycle, a new acquisition out of which he derived much pleasure ; it was so much handier when you wanted to get anywhere, than getting out the car. He liked to explore out-of-the-way parts of beautiful Dartmoor on foot. The bicycle only served to cut out the less interesting parts of the walk, the getting to and from the starting place for a circular walk of ten to twelve miles. It was rather lonely work for a man who was companionable by nature, but a love of nature and beautiful scenery kept him quite

happy, and the long walks made him as fit as could be. Much nicer than those stuffy old cotton mills !

Returning homewards one afternoon on his motor bike, rather tired after a long day's tramp, he ran into a thick fog about five miles from home. He was on one of the rough side roads leading to Hurstcombe, which he had ventured to use as a short cut to the village. So thick a fog at this time of year was most unusual, and John felt very cross when he had to dismount and wheel his bicycle for fear of running into trouble. He knew that about a mile further on he would come to a decent road again where he could afford to take normal risks. Luckily it was downhill and pushing the motor bicycle did not involve any excessive exertion. But it was riling none the less, especially as it was beginning to rain.

As he emerged on to the road he almost ran into someone who was standing with a push-bike by the side of the road.

"Oh, please, can you tell me where I am ?" said a plaintive female voice. "I've punctured my bike and I've lost my way in this beastly fog. I know I'm not far from Hurstcombe, but I do not in the least know whether I ought to turn to my right or my left."

"Sorry you've had bad luck with your bike, Miss Mandersfield," he answered. "I think I know the way home all right—you turn to the left here and about a mile further on you'll come to the Huxtables' farm. You'll know your way then all right, won't you ? It's a straight run to Upton Green and you can't go wrong."

"Thank you very much," said Beatrice rather

stiffly. "I know exactly where I am now. Good-bye," and she turned to wheel her machine in the homeward direction.

"Oh, but, please, if it's only a puncture that's the matter with your bike, do let me mend it for you so that you can ride. It'll take you more than an hour walking home, and it's coming on to rain."

"No, thanks, really. I'm quite happy walking, and I don't mind the rain at all."

John turned to get on his machine, when suddenly a spirit of determination seized him. What nonsense for this girl to pretend she liked pushing a punctured bike five miles home in the rain. Just some silly idea of politeness, he supposed, or not wanting to give trouble. He would mend the puncture whether she liked it or not.

"Do let me put your bike right," he insisted, propping his motor bicycle up as he spoke and coming towards her. "It's no trouble at all and won't take more than a few minutes."

Beatrice raged inwardly at finding herself at the mercy of "The Bounder," but her heart failed her as the light rain changed into a regular downpour. She permitted John to take the bicycle from her.

"Thank you very much. I could walk very well. But it is wet, isn't it ?"

"Wet's no word for it. You're drenched already. May I just get my bike and yours under the shelter of that thick hedge ? It'll be an easier job if we can get out of the rain."

It doesn't take long for skilled fingers to mend a puncture, but one can't hurry too much over the job or the patch won't hold, so Beatrice was obliged to wait some little time before her machine was ready

for her to mount. She felt rather embarrassed and very cross. Her independent nature revolted against having to appeal to anyone for help, and of all people in the world, to this most objectionable young man, who would probably expect her to consider herself under an obligation to him. However, she couldn't help feeling grateful. That walk home would have been rather awful. So she condescended to offer one or two remarks on the weather while he pursued his task.

When the bicycle was ready he led it out into the road for her and waited for her to mount.

"Thank you very much indeed," she said, "but would you please go on first? You would pass me, anyway, soon after I started and I don't like motor bikes rushing by me."

Her remark was obviously sensible, so John mounted his machine and started down the road after bidding her good-bye.

In the evening, smoking his pipe in a comfortable chair, he mused on the afternoon's episode. What an extremely nice girl she was, he thought. There was something indescribably charming about her. Yet how or why he couldn't tell. Why should he know and feel that she was nice and charming, when, as a matter of fact, she had been neither nice nor charming in her manner to him? Quite the reverse. She had almost seemed to resent his assistance, and her few remarks were the very minimum demanded by the rules of ordinary politeness. He had a sort of feeling that this young girl was possessed of a very determined character, and that for some reason or another she disliked him intensely. It didn't matter much, anyway, but he didn't like being

disliked, especially by someone to whom he felt so strongly attracted.

Beatrice did not think deeply on the subject. She felt cross that it should have been this particular young man who had come to her rescue. What rotten luck. Why couldn't it have been Aubrey ? That would have been nice.

She was very fond indeed of Aubrey, but he didn't seem to have the gift of being around just when he was wanted.

CHAPTER VII

MR. PRENTER was getting up the usual concert on Easter Monday in aid of funds for the annual choir outing, and wanted John to sing.

John had a pleasant baritone voice and was considered a great attraction on the programme. He would be glad to sing, and proposed giving "Alice, where art thou ?" or "Drake's Drum."

"Those are both very nice songs, Mr. Cole," said the schoolmaster, smiling ; "but, as a matter of fact, we all prefer your comic ones. Can't you give us a comic ?"

"Of course I'll give you a comic song if you prefer it. I would always sooner sing comic songs, but they are rather unnerving. I'm always afraid I'm not going to be as funny as I ought to be."

"You needn't worry about that. Why, the boys are still laughing over those two songs you sang last year—Corney Grain's, I think they were, weren't they ?"

"Yes, Corney Grain brought up to date and a few topical allusions inserted."

"Well, please, let's have something like that again. The best bits were the local hits you put in yourself. I'll let you have some notes about recent occurrences that you can touch on, and I won't

suggest anything that would hurt anyone's feelings."

Mr. Prenter took his departure and John betook himself to the piano to run through his songs and select something suitable for the occasion. He played well, and might possibly have played very well if he had devoted himself to it more, but he was an outdoor man, and could never bring himself to spend much time at the piano, being quite satisfied if he could play his own accompaniments, or help anyone else out with a song.

When the concert came off, his two songs were the hit of the evening. The topical allusions evoked great mirth and loud applause from the audience. There was a reference to a recent bout of fisticuffs between two of the village lads, another concerning the recent football victory over a neighbouring village, but the gem of the performance was the verse dealing with the case of young Jack Honeywill, who had been sent head over heels into a muck-heap by an infuriated sow.

After the performance Tom Westaway came up and wanted to shake hands.

"I don't bear no grudge," he said, "about the rough-and-tumble we had over that blasted old dog, I wouldn't a done it if I hadn't been a bit drunk, and you wouldn't have beat me neither if it hadn't been for the same reason. I've felt a bit sore about it, but I can't bear ill will to a man who can sing like you do. That bit about Jack Honeywill. My stars! I laughed till I thought I'd bust."

Mrs. Cole heard all about John's success at the concert next morning, when Mrs. Carford came over to see her and tell her the latest village news.

She was getting stronger now, and was usually

down to the midday meal, after which, if the day was fine, she liked to lie in a big cane chair in a warm corner of the garden and read and doze. It wasn't easy to find warm corners for her in April, but there was bright sunshine to-day and not much wind, and after lunch John found a beautiful nook for her by the south wall in the fruit garden. She said she felt like talking and asked him to get a chair and sit beside her for a while.

He sat beside her—dear little mother—patting her hand, and telling her that it was time he got back to work. She must get quite strong so that he could leave her with a light heart.

She said that she was getting better every day, but she didn't want John to leave her, and then she began to talk about the concert.

"I am so glad to know that your singing was appreciated," she said, looking at her son with maternal pride. "Mrs. Carford was telling me how very amusing your songs were and how delighted the people were with your performance. But I do so wish you would sing nice songs instead of those vulgar comic songs."

"My darling mother," he replied smiling, "what a harsh critic you are. I like both kinds of songs, but I think it is nicer to amuse people than merely to edify them. It's a weakness of mine, I suppose. I do like being amused myself, and I do not always want to be edified. Haven't you ever heard a song of mine, or anyone else's, that might be called comic without being vulgar?"

"Yes, dear, I suppose I have, but what I mean is that you don't seem to take the serious view of life in general that is in accordance with what I would

call a Christian outlook. It seems to me unchristian-like to make fun of one's neighbours' shortcomings, don't you think so ? ”

“ I'm awfully sorry, mother, to absolutely disagree with you. I do honestly try to lead a decent sort of Christian life, according to my own outlook. I fail a good deal, of course, but that doesn't discourage me. One isn't born a saint, God knows that. It's not in my nature to brood over weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. I daresay I'm all wrong, but I cannot believe that fun and laughter are wicked. If I ever bothered my head to imagine the joys of heaven, I'm sure my scheme would include fun and laughter or it wouldn't be heaven for me.”

“ You really shock me, dear,” replied his mother with a sigh. “ You talk of these things in such a flippant way.”

“ I don't mean to be flippant, mother, and I'm awfully sorry if my ideas upset you, but you wouldn't like me to pretend to be what I'm not. From what I see of life and my fellow-men it seems to me that too much goody-goodyness leads to hypocrisy. If God gave me a cheerful nature I feel sure it is one of the ‘ talents ’ He meant me to use.”

The conversation then turned on to the subject of his Territorial commission, and Mrs. Cole made him feel how much this distressed her. Poor John was in for a bad time. Then she said she felt a little tired and would try and take a nap, so, after wrapping her shawl round her shoulders and tucking her rug round her feet he left her, to seek a little relief for his feelings in a walk down the village.

He wanted to think over things a bit. He loved

his mother dearly, and his father as well. He tried to be a good son to them, and he certainly honoured them as he was told to do in the fifth Commandment. But what difficult things parents were ! Expecting their children to grow up exactly like themselves. Why, there'd be no progress in the world if things went on like that. Sons and daughters undoubtedly inherited many things from their parents. Quite certainly so on the physical side, but what of the spiritual side ? There was nothing to show that there was any such thing as spiritual heredity. Is the soul of a child in the remotest sense related to the souls of its two parents ?—Can there be soul relationships at all ? It seemed to him that there could not be. On the spiritual plane family relationships were non-existent. Yet parents always seemed to have that exasperating tendency to regard their children as mere replicas of themselves, instead of which each child was really a wonderful individual standing alone before God.

The result of all this parental misunderstanding was that by acting according to the lights of his nature, he acted contrary to the desires and hopes of his parents. Then ought one, to please one's parents, to go against the dictates of one's own nature ? To be false to oneself ? Of course not. But what a muddle it all was. He'd better think of something else.

He walked into the Post Office and bought some stamps, chatting for a few minutes with Mr. Wollacombe, the postmaster. Mr. Wollacombe was a great politician, and ten minutes' talk with him on the respective merits of Socialism and Toryism acted as quite a tonic to John.

“ There’s a lot in socialism, I’m sure,” he said, as he bid good-bye to the old man, “ but it’s heady stuff in more senses than one, as far as I can see. Beautiful dreams and ideas that never turn into anything of practical use. If men were what they’re not, and never will be, and if, and if, and if. . . . Socialism would be a jolly good thing. But we don’t live on ‘ ifs,’ we’ve got to do with facts.”

When he got home he found his mother in a state of great excitement. Percy had written asking forgiveness and begging to be allowed to come and see his parents.

Mr. Cole wrote cordially asking him to come at once and all would be forgiven, and Mrs. Cole began her preparations for celebrating the return of the prodigal.

Percy’s behaviour had been almost more upsetting to his father than to his mother. With him it was a combination of anger and sorrow, with her only sorrow. But as a deeply religious man, with the example of the Bible-story before him, Mr. Cole had no hesitation in extending his forgiveness to his erring son.

His conscience, however, made him think a good deal on the meaning of that word “ forgiveness,” and he found it hard to define. In the first place he accepted it fully as meaning, “ I will not refer to the past, and you shall not be punished by any alteration in my will, or in any other way.” But was that forgiveness in its real sense ? It seemed that real forgiveness would involve forgetting ; and, being human, he felt that he could never forget. Nor could he, even with the aid of prayer, quite eradicate a feeling of anger. How could he be expected to ?

Their family of five children had all been a credit to their parents, with the exception of this one, who had barely escaped bringing disgrace on them so far, and would probably end by doing so. Continually getting mixed up in discreditable affairs, generally with reference to a girl. And then capping all by his rude and insulting behaviour on the day of his flight from Fir Grove. Really, it was very hard to forgive, but he would try. He was sure he could manage it if the boy showed real regret, and was determined to turn over a new leaf. Yes, now he'd got the right idea. Forgiveness is, of course, dependent on repentance, repentance involves a casting off of the former sin, so if there's no repentance there's no forgiveness. The Prodigal Son was forgiven because he repented. He would treat Percy on the same lines.

Two days later the young man arrived. John went down to the station in the afternoon to meet him and drive him home. Percy alighted with a suit-case as soon as the train stopped, and, catching sight of his brother, strode up to him with a smile.

"Hullo, old King Cole my lad," he said, grasping his hand. "Hope you keep on being a jolly old soul! Quite the smart young country gentleman we're turning into! Long time since we've met. You've improved, old man. There was room for it."

John greeted him warmly; he was really very fond of Percy. If he hadn't been his own brother he would have been often tempted to think him somewhat of a cad, but beneath all his vulgarity and bumptiousness, John knew that he had lots of good points.

Percy certainly did *not* look "quite the young

country gentleman." On the contrary, he was distinctly the young man from town. He simply sparkled with smartness. He wore a bowler hat with a slight tilt over the right eye, a rather high collar with a blue and white spotted tie, a light-coloured tweed suit with a striking pattern and a pronounced crease down the trouser legs, and very shiny brown leather shoes. A flower in his button-hole, a fragment of coloured silk handkerchief protruding from his breast pocket, and a silver-mounted Malacca cane in his hand, completed the resplendent turn-out.

At Fir Grove Mr. Cole met them at the door. He shook Percy's hand warmly, patting his shoulder with his left hand as he drew him into the house.

"Well, Percy, it does one good to see you again, looking so strong and healthy," said his father. "London air seems to suit you better than the country."

"Yes, father, thanks. I'm pretty fit, and I believe London does suit me. Where's mother?"

"Come along. She's dying to see you," said Mr. Cole, guiding him to the sitting-room. "She wanted to meet you at the door, but she's not really strong enough to do much getting about, so I wouldn't let her."

He led Percy into the room and left the two together with a warning: "Don't excite your mother, and don't let her talk too much."

Percy bent down to kiss the gently-smiling face, while she put her arm round him and drew him to her in a warm embrace.

She was so glad to see her beloved boy again, and how well he was looking. She had nothing to say

in the way of reproaches, nothing but words of love and affection.

Percy felt for the moment in a contrite mood. There was something in his mother's love that touched him and made him feel sorry that he was such a worthless fellow. It had hardly struck him before that the adjective "worthless" might be applied to him.

They talked for more than a quarter of an hour, and during the whole time she said nothing at all to him except telling him over and over again how he was always her darling boy, and how much she had missed him and longed to see him again. And yet this feeling of being "worthless" forced itself into his mind. It might have ended by making him feel quite unhappy, but luckily a tap at the door put an end to the conversation, and to his unusual train of thought.

Mr. Cole put his head in and called to Percy: "Come along out now and take a look round the place. Things have grown finely since you were last here. We must leave mother to a quiet nap till tea-time."

After tea they sat and talked over events in the family.

Percy did rather more than his share of the talking. He didn't want so much to hear about the other members as to tell them all about his own great doings.

"I'm really quite a flyer at my job," he said proudly. "Messrs. Wills & Smith wouldn't know what to do without me. These aeroplane engines are very tricky things, and new patents and improvements are coming out every day ; you have to bustle

to keep up to date. Not many engineers succeed with them, but with me it's a gift. They've doubled my salary in the last twelve months, and if I insisted on a further rise they'd give it me. But I play the game and don't bother them."

"I suppose you've made friends in London," said his mother anxiously. "I mean friends among really nice people?"

"Oh, rather, mother. Only the niciest nice will do for Percy," he rejoined with alacrity. "No fear about that. Quite top-hole people. Wish you could know them. I'll bring some of them down here some day to see my dear little mother. They're not only nice but lively. They'd wake up your dull old Hurstcombe right enough. It'd be rather fun."

"Mrs. Prenter said something about a niece of hers having met you in London. Who are her people? Are they some of the lively ones?" inquired Mr. Cole.

"Not much," he replied, with a touch of embarrassment. "Dull as ditch water. I suppose you mean the Garstins. Mother takes in lodgers. Miss Garstin, by way of being pretty, but conceited. Haven't seen them for a year."

By the time John suggested taking his brother for a walk, the family were getting the least bit tired of hearing all about Percy, and what a brilliant fellow he was.

His departure came as a relief even to his mother who loved him so. She had a sort of numb feeling in her head as if she had been listening to the buzz of a circular saw. She didn't even know that it was Percy who had given her that feeling, but she felt she needed a little quiet.

John left the next day in spite of Percy's protests, "I've promised mother to stay a week," said the latter, "and I can't stick this dull old hole by myself. You and I aren't built quite the same way, but you're not so sanctimonious as the rest of them, and you're altogether quite passable as a brother. I shall go dotty before the week's up."

Mr. Cole watched in vain for signs of repentance in his son. Percy had gone as far as telling his mother that he was sorry he had caused such a rumpus, but his general behaviour indicated quite an unrepentant mood. His point of view seemed to be that they ought to be jolly glad to have him back again, and his return to the fold was a magnanimous act towards parents whose lack of sympathy had been the sole cause of the rupture.

Time certainly did hang a bit heavy on his hands during the next few days, but he got out a good deal, careering about the country on John's motor bike, and frightening poultry into fits.

He had a few friends in the village. Unfortunately they were among the less reputable characters, and after all the pi-jaw he'd had from his father lately he felt he'd have to go slow.

He occasionally sauntered down, however, to refresh himself at the Plough Inn, and give the people a chance of admiring his London outfit.

On one such occasion he almost ran into Aubrey Campbell, who was walking down the road with Beatrice, but he was not aware of it, as they had turned round a corner before actually meeting.

"Good Lord!" said Aubrey, in horror-stricken tones, "here's the Bounder coming. It's a fortunate thing we turn off here. I've never seen him since

that day at the Vicarage. I don't suppose he'd have had the cheek to speak if we'd passed him. But really if he had, I should have felt inclined to hit him."

"How fierce you are, Aubrey," said Beatrice, with a touch of sarcasm. "Fancy wanting to hit such a very smart little tailor's model! Besides, you're getting mixed up. That's not The Bounder; that's the younger brother."

"I'm not interested in the details of the Fir Grove family, or who's the brother of who, but as Sinclair and I had the honour of bestowing the title, I suppose we know who we meant. That is the ill-bred vulgarian who was in charge of the so-called Art Gallery when we went to see it."

"I see. Somehow we got mixed up with the two brothers, and we have always thought that it was John who had upset you so. This one is called Percy."

"Oh, bother the Johns and Percys, Beatrice. You seem quite well up in the nomenclature of these weird people. I don't suppose Colonel Mandersfield has got into the way of having them up to the house, has he?"

"No. We haven't got as far as that yet, quite," said Beatrice crossly.

"Well, for goodness' sake, don't talk about them any more."

"But I must tell you that I have met one of them. I thought it was the Bounder. It was the one, anyway, that we call by that name. He struck me at the time as not being very boundery."

She told Aubrey about the very simple episode of the bicycle.

“ Well, you’ve just got to be careful, Beatrice, ” said Aubrey in a warning voice. “ That’s just the way these people try to strike up an acquaintance. You must cut him dead if he has the cheek to presume on it.”

“ Really, Aubrey,” she replied, laughing, “ you’re just like the birds in the Caucus race in *Alice in Wonderland*.”

“ I don’t remember the Caucus race bit. What was it about ? What was the matter with the birds ? ” he asked.

“ Alice complained that ‘ they ordered her about so.’ The way you were talking made me feel as if I were Alice and you were one of the birds.”

“ Oh, don’t be silly. I wasn’t ordering you about. You and I have always been pals since you were a little kid, and one has a sort of feeling that we belong to each other. At least that’s how I feel. And it riles me to think of any of those outsiders even presuming to mend your bike for you.”

Aubrey spoke rather seriously, and Beatrice thought she wouldn’t tease him any more.

Just beyond the Post Office, at the turning down to the Almshouses, she took leave of him.

“ I’ve got to go down and see old Mrs. Biddlecombe and take her this parcel from mother,” she said, as she turned to leave him. “ She’ll probably keep me gossiping for a long time and it would bore you. So good-bye, Aubrey.”

Aubrey stood watching her for a few minutes as she turned down the road, and then walked off in the homeward direction. He thought over what he’d just been saying to her. Something about belonging to each other, he couldn’t quite remember

what. Yes, that was it. He liked her more than any girl he knew, and some day he'd fall in love with her very likely. But she'd be a difficult person to tackle. She had a will of her own and a very strong character. Rather rotten that. Girls with strong wills upset the balance of nature. Result of all these new ideas, he supposed. However, if he loved her she'd probably love him, and the strong will wouldn't matter when it encountered a stronger.

Meantime Beatrice had reached the Almshouses and was chatting with Mrs. Biddlecombe. The old lady was fond of talking, and, when you were not in a hurry, was quite worth listening to. Her conversation was not merely village gossip, but chiefly consisted of rather quaint views on life in general.

Beatrice admitted to herself no curiosity on the subject of the incident concerning John Cole and the dog, but as Tim sidled up to her to be patted, she couldn't resist saying :

"Poor old Tim. Did they ill-treat him, then ? What a shame. Such a nice old doggie."

This was enough to set old Mrs. Biddlecombe going.

"What's that about ill-treating my Tim ? I reckon you'm thinking about Tom Westaway's wicked deeds two years ago. A bad lot that young fellow, and won't never come to any good. He'd a killed you that day, sure enough, if he hadn't a been stopped, my faithful old Tim. Bless my dear soul, 'twas a terrible beating you got."

Having got so far, Mrs. Biddlecombe exasperatingly changed the subject on to the question of the general relations between man and beast, and the probability of animals having the same chances of happiness in a future life as human beings.

“There’s no sense in believing they just go out when they die. They lead good and bad lives same as we do, and I like to think they’ll have their chance on Judgment Day same as we will. Parson says ’taint a Christian belief. But I don’t know. Our Lord said nothing about it one way or another.”

Beatrice was interested in these views ; she held some sort of belief on the same lines in an indefinite sort of way. But now that she was here she might as well hear the whole story of Tim’s troubles. So she asked to be told all about it.

Mrs. Biddlecombe expressed surprise that anyone should be ignorant of the events of that terrible day, and was only too delighted to give the whole story in full.

She ended the narration with a tribute to the gallantry of Tim’s rescuer.

“That young Mr. John Cole that sings the funny songs. Not half Tom Westaway’s size, but he stood up to him and says : ‘ Let go that dog or I’ll make you,’ and then fighting him and sending him down on his face in the road. Served him right, too. But I reckon he wouldn’t have won if Tom hadn’t happened to have been a bit drunk, thank the Lord.”

Having once got her on the subject, it was not easy to get her off again, and it was some time before Beatrice was able to put an end to the flow of conversation and make her escape.

At last Mrs. Biddlecombe paused for breath and Beatrice managed to say good-bye before she had time to think of a fresh topic.

On her way home her mind was chiefly occupied with thoughts of Aubrey.

She had never met anyone she liked half so much. And how nice he was to her. The holidays at Upton Green were always enjoyable, but there was never very much to do. If it were not for the Campbells in general, and Aubrey in particular, things would really be rather dull. How good he was at all games, too, and every kind of sport. Years ago she remembered he had given her her first riding lesson. Then there was that never-to-be-forgotten afternoon at Richmond when they were in London the year before last, and the delightful day on the Thames.

Sinclair was really a good brother, and always ready to do things when she asked him. But Aubrey seemed to think of things without being asked. That's the difference between a brother and not a brother.

Colonel Mandersfield's voice broke in on her reflections as she walked up the drive at Upton Green.

"You look as if you were thinking deep thoughts, Beatrice," he said, with paternal cheerfulness. "Holidays will be over in a week. I suppose your mind is running on educational subjects?"

"Not at all, dad," she answered with a smile. "Aubrey's been escorting me to see Mrs. Biddlecombe, and I was just thinking how nice it was of him."

She spent the remainder of the afternoon helping her father in the garden. He was not an expert gardener but he liked seeing things grow, and he liked to feel he had some share in their welfare. His efforts were mainly confined to weeding, clipping, and tying up things.

At night her thoughts recurred to old Mrs. Biddlecombe and her entertaining snatches of philosophy.

And that story, too, about John Cole and the dog. It was hard lines that it should have been so misrepresented. It had been spoken of as something rather disgraceful connected with a "drunken brawl" with an underlying suggestion that both the drunkenness and the brawl were to be attributed to him. Whereas it was just the other way. He seemed in Mrs. Biddlecombe's eyes quite a hero. And he certainly had behaved in an awfully decent way.

It was hard luck on him too that his unpleasant nickname had been earned for him by his odious brother, and bestowed on him by a general misunderstanding.

The world was rather unjust.

CHAPTER VIII

THERE was a large gathering at Highfields for Christmas.

Gwendoline had come home at last with her husband and a baby. The three other girls were there, and Aubrey, who had brought the two Maynards with him from London.

The Campbells always kept Christmas in good old-fashioned style, and the festivities on this occasion were exceptionally brilliant owing to a series of original entertainments devised by Peggy.

The New Year was ushered in with heavy snow and hard frost, and towards the end of the holidays the girls were able to enjoy a few days' skating.

Colonel Mandersfield was called to London in February in connection with a shareholders' meeting of a company in which he was interested. He was to be away for only two days. On the afternoon of the day on which she expected his return, Mrs. Mandersfield received the tragic news that he had been killed in an accident on the line.

The Campbells were the first to hear of the disaster, receiving a wire from a mutual friend who was in the same train, and who thought it might lessen the shock if the news were broken to Mrs. Mandersfield through them.

Sinclair was wired for from Cambridge and turned up late the same night, having motored part of the way.

Beatrice was sent for from school and arrived pale and red-eyed on the next afternoon. The body was brought to Hurstcombe and buried in the cemetery beside the old church where Herbert Mandersfield had married Catherine Wilkinson just twenty-five years ago. So we come and go.

Colonel Mandersfield was sadly missed in the village where there were many still left among the older folk who remembered him as a lad. They said : " He never forgot a friend, and was always ready to lend a hand in times of trouble." And that was a fitting tribute.

Even the Cole family remembered him kindly. They had of course never been on terms of intimacy with the Mandersfields, but the Colonel had always had a cheery greeting for any of them whom he met in the village, and had never given them that frozen feeling which they felt in the presence of the Squire and his folk. And Mrs. Cole was full of sympathy for any woman in the tragedy of widowhood.

She sometimes felt quite glad—though she thought it was perhaps wrong of her—to know that that pain would be spared her. She would be the first to go, and it might not be very long before her call came. She and Henry had sometimes talked about the inevitable separation and they agreed that they should like to go together. But that sort of thing never happened. To be happily married is in a sense as tragic as being unhappily married. The first leads up to an intense tragedy, the second is a long-drawn-out one of lesser degree. There was always this balance in life. More happiness, more sorrow. Less love, less pain.

She brooded over John's " militarism. If only

he would give up being a soldier, she felt she would be much happier.

Mr. Cole wrote him a long letter giving him all the Hurstcombe news and adding :

“ Mother grows weaker day by day, and I fear she will not be long with us. She harps a great deal on your holding a commission in the Territorials. I don’t want to renew the arguments that you and I have had on that score. You apparently hold your own opinions, and I certainly do mine. But for her sake, lad, don’t you think you could make the sacrifice ? Stick to it if you’ve a mind to, but honestly I think that if you gave it up it would be like a new lease of life to her. . . . ”

John felt that he must bow to fate, and sent in his resignation with a heavy heart. He could not hesitate under the circumstances when his mother’s happiness, and perhaps her life, were at stake.

Mrs. Cole was glad when she got the news. What good children she had been blessed with. Even Percy tried to cheer her up by writing sprightly letters at long intervals. In his last letter he had told her that his business was “ fizzing ” and that he was becoming more and more indispensable to the firm.

He gave exaggerated accounts of his importance and prosperity, but it was quite true that he was doing very well.

He had thought to himself that he was quite cured of his love affair with that cold-hearted girl. There were lots of girls much nicer than Rose who would welcome his attentions.

But in March he heard through a friend that she had returned to Bayswater, and at once he was filled

with a frantic desire to see her again, to throw himself at her feet, to worship her, to do anything, in short, which would induce her to come to his arms.

He called at the boarding-house and was received rather coldly by Mrs. Garstin who told him that Rose was out, but that if he cared to come to midday dinner on Sunday, he could see her.

He duly presented himself on Sunday, arrayed in what he considered "tip-top style." But in spite of his dressy appearance he surprised himself by feeling, for the first time in his life, humble and nervous.

Mrs. Garstin had arranged a separate table in the big dining-room for herself and Rose, Percy and a Mr. Howell, an old friend who was passing through London.

When the maid opened the door in response to his ring he found Rose in the passage pinning up a notice—imploping boarders to be more careful to turn out the hall and passage lights at night—on the green baize board destined for such purposes.

She turned towards him as he entered.

"How d'you do, Percy?" she said with the faintest smile on her face. "It's a long time since we last met. How well you're looking. Come along in and see mother. Dinner will be ready in a few minutes."

"Does one good to see you again, Rose," he replied shaking her hand warmly and squeezing her unresponsive fingers. "A year and a half since we last met. You haven't altered a bit."

He allowed himself to be guided to Mrs. Garstin's small private sitting-room on the ground floor, where he was greeted with polite formality and invited to take a seat on the small sofa.

Rose seated herself by her mother, taking up an illustrated Sunday paper which she had been reading, and turning over the pages to glance at the pictures.

While they waited for Mr. Howell, conversation turned on the usual trivialities. Percy felt uncomfortable and embarrassed, he didn't know why. It seemed to him so foolish to be talking about the rotten old weather, and some silly play in a footling theatre, when all he wanted was to say to Rose over and over again : "What a peach you are. I love you madly."

The gong sounded and Mr. Howell was announced at the same moment. After exchanging greetings and introducing Percy, Mrs. Garstin led the way into the dining-room where most of the boarders were already seated, looking stiff and uncomfortable in their Sunday clothes, and with expressions of hungry expectancy on their eager faces.

They seated themselves on the four sides of the small table, Mr. Howell opposite Mrs. Garstin and Percy opposite Rose.

The meal was an ample one. Soup, fish, roast sirloin of beef with Yorkshire pudding, apple tart and cheese. Mrs. Garstin offered nothing to her guests in the way of drink but dry ginger ale which Mr. Howell apparently enjoyed, but which Percy swallowed with an inward groan.

He did not do justice to the meal. His mind was running on Rose all the time, and he wondered if he was to be pushed out as soon as dinner was over or if he would be allowed to take her for a walk.

He frequently tried to catch her eye, but she cleverly avoided his loving glances, except on one occasion when he caught her unawares and darted

the full strength of his affection into her limpid orbs. But even that was a failure ; her limpid orbs might have been made of glass.

He sought her foot under the table and thought he touched it once, but it was hastily withdrawn. A second effort brought his foot in contact with Mr. Howell's, so he gave up further efforts. He thought Mr. Howell uninteresting, and very bad-mannered to stick his legs out like that so far under the table.

After the meal they returned to the small sitting-room where Mrs. Garstin offered her guests a cup of coffee and a cigarette, and a rather dull conversation ensued which even Percy was not able to brighten up.

He was wondering if that old ass, Howell, was going to stay there much longer. Would he be able to get an opportunity of asking Mrs. Garstin's permission to take Rose for a walk ? Would Rose come if he got the permission ? And would she be nice to him ? She was looking more beautiful than ever, but he did not see on her face the soft and yielding expression he was always hoping to find on it.

He was saved the necessity of putting the question of the walk with Rose to Mrs. Garstin, by that lady's suggesting it herself, though not quite in the form he had wished.

Her idea was that they should all take a turn in the Park. Everyone expressed their delight at the proposal and Mrs. Garstin and Rose went up to put on their things. So far so good, thought Percy, though he disliked the notion of walking all four together. If she'd had any sense she'd have taken

old Howell along and left him and Rose to walk on their own. Still, it wasn't so bad. The other two would walk on in front and he and Rose could linger behind and, even if they couldn't do much love-making, they could at least get over the nasty part of the mutual explanations. He was longing to hear what Rose had been doing all this time. As likely as not she'd been making love to all sorts of fellows. The idea made his blood boil.

It was pleasant in the Park, the sun shone brightly and the slight breeze was not unpleasantly cold for the middle of March. The buds were showing on the trees and one had a pleasant anticipation of spring.

Percy walked with raging heart beside Mrs. Garstin, while Mr. Howell followed behind with Rose. They had got fixed up like this at the start. He hadn't been quick enough, and before he could get a move on Mrs. Garstin had taken her place at his side, while Mr. Howell fell into line with Rose. What had happened to him to-day ? He seemed unusually stupid. He who was always noted for being so "spry."

However as things were he would have to make the best of it and be nice to mother. She had lots to say about Rose, and she wanted to let Percy understand that any future relations between him and her daughter must be conducted on the lines of the strictest propriety.

"I really think you two would be better apart. Your attachment will only lead to trouble. I can't have my girl running about with a young man who is not going to marry her, and you are hardly suitable, being younger than she is. I don't suppose she is

the least bit in love with you, and I'm not at all sure that your feelings for her are to be dignified by the name of 'love.' So after to-day you'd better keep away. I'm not warning you off, I'm only suggesting for your own good that it would be best to draw the line at simple friendship. If your own feelings are stronger than that, I think you'll be disappointed."

Percy made some confused reply about it being rather hard luck on a fellow, and so on, which was cut short by Mrs. Garstin calling to the others and suggesting that they should sit down for a few minutes.

When they left their seats to continue the walk Percy darted to Rose's side. Mr. Howell, who was talking to her at the time, naturally remained on the other side. They thus began to move forward in this ridiculous order—Mrs. Garstin leading, and the other three following just behind. "Confound that idiot Howell," thought Percy, "I'd like to bash his hat over his eyes."

Mrs. Garstin, having a happy sense of humour was vastly amused at Percy's dilemma. She glanced back with a malicious smile at Rose and her two cavaliers.

For some minutes she refrained from adjusting the situation, but at last, fearing from the savage look on Percy's face that he might be on the verge of doing or saying something really unpleasant, she decided to end it.

"It's rather unkind leaving me to walk by myself," she said, turning round and smiling, "one of you must really come and keep me company."

Percy looked at Mr. Howell expecting him to make a forward move. Mr. Howell looked at Percy

in similar expectation. While the two men glared at each other, Rose stepped up to her mother, taking her arm and sauntering quietly on.

This was a move that had not suggested itself to Mrs. Garstin's mind, and it was not a premeditated joke on Rose's part.

But it certainly did make things even funnier than before. Mr. Howell and Percy followed the two ladies in silence. Percy wondered why the earth didn't open and swallow up this ill-mannered, fat-headed swine. Or fire and lightning from heaven. His furious reflections were cut short by Mrs. Garstin who had had her joke and thought it time to relieve the tension before something gave way. She called to Mr. Howell to admire some pigeons which were pecking about in the grass, and Rose fell back to join Percy. At last.

Now that they were together neither of them knew quite how to begin. Rose, however, overcame the difficulty by asking Percy what he had been doing all this long time. That was a good move. A wise woman always knows that to be really interesting to a man it is only necessary to get him to talk about himself. She did not love Percy, and had no husband-catching designs, but she liked to feel that she was "interesting" to him.

He was so excited in telling her of his success with the motor people and his skill with aeroplane engines, that for the moment he even forgot to be amorous. When he was out of breath he let her have her turn. She told him she had had a happy time in Ireland. He wanted to know how many love affairs she had had. She exasperated him by telling him that she had met a man over there whom she thought she

really could love. He cheered up when she went on to say with just the sign of a tear in her pretty eyes that he was dead. Drowned, out yachting, the very day their engagement was to have been announced.

Secretly delighted, he pretended to sympathise. With that sad look on her sweet face, she looked more bewitching than ever. He caught her hand and squeezed it, but she gently withdrew it and went on with the narration of her adventures.

When they parted in the late afternoon, Percy obtained permission to call round whenever he felt inclined, and he went off to his club rejoicing.

They were out together several times in April but Rose always checked his love-making advances and there was no staying out late. Not even one kiss except on rare occasions.

Rose was really getting tired of it all. Now that she knew what love was, it was more certain than ever that she could never love Percy. It seemed rough luck to be keeping him hanging round. He might offer to marry her. If he did her mother would certainly consent and expect her to do likewise. But could she ? Can there be any happiness in marriage without love on both sides ? She thought not, at any rate not for people with feelings like hers. And she hated the idea of being out just to catch a husband. Matrimony in the abstract had no great attraction for her. She was very happy with her mother, helping in the house, and she had lots of friends and plenty of distraction.

Percy also thought over the situation, and astonished himself by finding that he was "in love" in the truest and fullest sense. He no longer had the joyous feeling of the early days of their acquaintance,

when he just wanted to kiss her and hug her, and get whatever pleasure he could out of her society.

What he felt now was almost as much pain as pleasure. He had a sort of desire to worship her which had supplanted the old desire to just "pull her about."

He was horrified at his own seriousness. What did it all mean ? Matrimony ? What an appalling prospect. But there was no getting away from it, he'd marry her. Probably she loved him like mad only she held off so as to be sure of landing her fish. Women were always anglers. Well, she'd land him without much trouble.

He rushed round to Bayswater to propose, and was met with a refusal. Incredible.

In May he proposed again, and once more in early June. Rose put the case clearly before him on the third occasion. She liked him but did not love him, and she would never marry without love. He was confident that he could teach her to love him. She said love was not taught.

Percy was fearfully unhappy, and rather angry. His friends noticed a change in his buoyant disposition, and thought him looking ill.

He contemplated suicide.

Why not he and Rose together with a gas tube ?

CHAPTER IX

MARY came home to Highfields in June. She had passed all her exams brilliantly and would soon be a fully qualified doctor. Her father and mother were very proud of her success, though neither of them had ever wished any of their daughters to take up a career of any sort. However, if women wanted careers the medical profession offered the widest scope, and Mary seemed cut out for it.

Gwendoline and her husband were in London and were leaving for India at the end of the month.

The rest of the family assembled between the middle and the end of July, and life was quite gay in Hurstcombe. Aubrey was going up to Scotland in August to shoot grouse, but in the meantime bestowed the light of his presence on Highfields.

Sinclair and Beatrice were at Upton Green. The family were still in mourning and went out very little, but every now and then some of the Campbells went up to see how they were getting on and play a game of tennis, and Sinclair and Beatrice sometimes came over to Highfields.

Mrs. Mandersfield sincerely mourned the loss of her husband. They had been an unusually devoted couple. After the funeral she had taken to her bed and remained there for several weeks suffering from a nervous breakdown following the shock. Then

she had suddenly revived, and now, five months after the event, was looking extremely well.

In the first paroxysm of her grief, and in her state of illness, she had hoped that she might die too. But Fate willed otherwise, and she was feeling stronger and fitter than she had felt for years. It vexed her that this should be so, but there was no helping it.

Sinclair had taken his degree at Cambridge and had now a year to prepare for the diplomatic examination. He thought of going to Spain to improve his knowledge of the language, and it would be a nice change for mother if she would come too when Beatrice went back to school.

Towards the end of the month the newspapers began to talk very seriously of the prospect of war in Europe. The Austrian archduke had been murdered on June 28th, and Austria had since been putting the screw on Servia.

Sir Clarence shook his head ominously and spoke of the possibility of England being eventually involved in the war if there was one. He was not in touch with anyone at the Foreign Office, and was not up in the details of British foreign policy, but if it came to a question of Germany and France taking off the gloves, he was sure we had some sort of an agreement to see France through.

However, that was looking a long way ahead. The younger people were interested, but very mildly. They thought father was letting his mind wander when he suggested that England might come into the trouble. Meantime, it was a glorious summer and they were making the most of it in every form of outdoor amusement.

On July 28th, they heard that Austria had declared war on Servia. After that there were so many criss-cross declarations of war that it made your head ache to try and follow them. But they could not help realising that it was a serious affair when England declared war on Germany on August 4th.

It was no longer a matter for talk and surmise. To-day was not as yesterday, or any number of thousands of yesterdays. Yet life went on just as it did yesterday. The sun shone, the birds sang, and the young people played tennis as before. One wondered that it could be so. How could everything be apparently so unchanged in the face of such a tremendous upheaval ?

It took a day or two for people to settle down to it and begin to think what it would mean to the nation, and to their individual selves.

Aubrey and Sinclair cursed their luck in not having chosen military careers. The army was mobilised and would soon be crossing the Channel to take part in the fray, and they would have to stay at home as onlookers.

Sir Clarence advised them not to worry too much about that. He thought the war would last at least a year, and the War Office would want every man they could lay their hands on to officer the new units that were to be raised. As they had both had some little training at school and Varsity, it would not be difficult for them to get commissions. They would all go up to London and see about it. Meantime, everyone wrote in to the War Office and offered their services.

The young men had hopes of being shortly in

France or Belgium or wherever it was the British army was off to, but their ardour was damped by Major Robertson, who prophesied a long period of training.

"Soldiering isn't learnt in a day, you know," he said when they broached the subject to him. "I wouldn't care to entrust the lives of men to any officer who had had less than a year's training—and that's little enough. But as things are, I expect they'll let you through with six months', or perhaps even four."

The Cole family were in a state of perturbation. War was a terrible thing, contrary to all Christ's teaching. How could one be a Christian and take up arms to kill people ?

Mr. Cole was quite clear in his mind that no Christian could take part in war without defying our Lord's injunctions, and was glad that none of his sons were in a position to take part in it.

Henry wrote expressing views similar to his father's.

John wrote a long letter explaining once more his point of view and winding up with the announcement that he was applying to be reinstated in the Territorials.

He felt sure that his mother would understand and would let him go with her blessing.

"I would never willingly do anything to distress mother," he said, "but I know she will think as I do in this crisis. Please write at once and let me know that she agrees, and I will not send in my application till I hear from you."

Mr. Cole replied in a letter of six closely-written pages, ending up with :

"Do as you feel your conscience directs you, my dear son, and may God be with you, and guide you. The news of your intention has been a terrible shock to your mother, and your re-instatement in the army will be her death warrant. She has not long to live, I fear, in any case. Her life hangs by a thread, and if you, as her loving son, feel that you are called on to cut that thread, do so."

John tore up his application.

Percy wrote in his usual florid style :

"I'm sorry, father, to hurt your feelings, but you'll never make me see things from your point of view. War seems to me to be a very fine thing and I long to be in it. But tell mother she needn't worry. I'm not likely to be given a job anywhere near the front, though I shall try for it all the time. Aeroplane people are what they want most, it appears. I want to be a pilot, and shall be, in the end. Meantime, owing to my knowledge of engine construction and so on I shall be kept on at the works to begin with. The War Office are thinking of taking over the whole show, and if they turn it into a military department, they'll dress us up like soldiers, and I'll be an officer. Some swank that when I come down to give you all a treat in my uniform !"

Mrs. Cole was sorry that any of her sons should be in any way mixed up in the war. But as regards Percy there was no use saying or doing anything. In any case it would have been inevitable as his firm had been taken over by the Government.

The people in the village were talking all day about the war, but not quite understanding yet what it was all about and what it had got to do with peaceful Devonshire peasants.

Major Tom Robertson overheard his gardener, Will Tregarth, talking to one of his mates about it.

The gist of their conversation was : " What do we want to go to war for Servia for ? Never heard of the place, and dunno where it is."

So he explained the situation to them as briefly as he could :

" France has always been threatened by Germany. If Germany conquered France she'd own the whole of Europe in a short time. That would be bad for us. So we had told France that if Germany attacked her we would help her. Belgium was a small country whose neutrality was guaranteed by Great Britain, France, Germany and the other Great Powers. That is to say, each of the Great Powers had said to the other : ' You mustn't touch Belgium. If you do we'll fight you.'

" Well, this is how the war began. Austria declared war on Servia. Russia said : ' We'll help Servia.' Germany said : ' We'll help Austria.' So that brought Russia and Germany into the quarrel against each other. Then Russia said to France : ' You've signed an agreement to help us if Germany declares war on us. Come along'—so France chipped in. Then Germany went for France, but the only weak spot in the French defences was the Franco-Belgian frontier. So Germany marched into Belgium. Then England had to come in, you see, because she'd promised to fight anyone who interfered with Belgium. So you understand it isn't a matter of choice, and it isn't fighting for Servia. It's just a case of keeping a promise, and we always do that. You wouldn't want us not to, would you ? "

There seemed a good deal of sense in what the

Major said, and Tregarth tried to pass on his knowledge to the other villagers when he visited the Plough Inn where the question of the war was a daily topic of conversation. So far, the only effect the war had produced on Hurstcombe was to increase the consumption of beer. But Tregarth got rather tangled up in his endeavours to state the case. In reply to Westaway who was for the fiftieth time putting the question: "What for do we want to go to war for Serbia for?" he explained.

"Well, Tom, it's like this here. Serbia went to war with Austria and Russia, then Germany and France had an agreement about Russia being neutral. So they came into the war. Then the English said: 'We don't want to fight, but if anyone comes into Belgium we'll have to.' So the Germans, who've always been wanting to fight us and get our colonies, came into Belgium, and we had to stick to our word and send our army over to turn them out."

"I don't think you've made it very clear, Will," replied one of the other men. "According to what you make out, Russia and Austria are on the same side. But I reckon they're not. Then I can't follow what we want to fight Belgium for. It's like supposing you and me had a row here over this pot of ale, and then Westaway walked over to young Chugford standing quietly by the door over there and gave him a clip over the ear."

"Well, I can't make it clearer to you. You've got no head for politics," retorted Tregarth, "and I didn't say we were fighting Belgium, we're fighting *for* Belgium, not against her."

Opinions differed on this point and were expressed with heat. The majority were certain that

we were going to fight Belgium because of something she'd done to Servia, and it was left at that.

The discussion then turned on what the war would mean to the people of the village.

"We sha'n't see much of it down our way, I reckon," said one of the men ; "we bain't going to have Germans and Belgians landing in Teignmouth and marching up here."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Harry Chugford meditatively, "there's not much to stop them if they'd a mind to come."

"Got a brother in the navy, Harry," Westaway threw in, "and you forget that Britannia rules the waves ! There's nothing coming near Old England while the navy's afloat. Can't see what they want soldiers for ; it's a sailor's job to protect the country."

"Well, seems they do want them anyway," remarked Tregarth. "The Major was saying we'd all have to be in it before long."

"Regular old soldier's talk that," said Tom Westaway with a sneer. "Been in it themselves and want to pull us all in. Like the fox who lost his brush and wanted to persuade the others 'twas the fashion. If I'd wanted to go for a soldier, I'd a gone long ago. You won't catch me going now, Germans or no Germans."

"You bide and see what comes, Tom," replied the old gardener. "The Major's a level-headed man and talks sense. He says everyone ought to join up so soon as he can, and those that don't join up'll be made to join later whether they like it or not."

"England's a free country and Devon's the freest bit of it," growled Tom. "I'd like to see

the man who'd make a soldier of me if I didn't want to be."

This brought on an argument about conscription which became heated. Voices grew hoarse and windpipes had to be moistened with deep draughts of ale. It was good business for the Plough Inn.

By closing time the majority had agreed that if they were wanted they'd go without being made to. There were a few extremists at each end of the line. Several of the younger men were all for going off at once to enlist, one or two of the older men shared Westaway's opinion that the country couldn't compel them to be soldiers if they didn't want to be, but the greater number preferred to await events and take things as they came.

A further endeavour was made by the Squire to enlighten the villagers. A meeting was held in the schoolroom at which several speakers addressed the people. Among others, Major Robertson dealt with the subject. He gave a graphic description of what the state of affairs would be like if the Germans won. His speech aroused the ire of the local newspaper printed in a neighbouring town which reported it under the alarming headlines :

PANIC-MONGERS AT HURSTCOMBE MARCH-HARE MAJOR SCARES VILLAGERS

About the middle of the month Sir Clarence went up to London with Aubrey, and Tom Robertson and Sinclair travelled up with them.

Lady Campbell was a patriotic mother, and her sentiments were fully shared by Mrs. Mandersfield. Both sincerely hoped that their sons might be allowed to take their part on the field of battle.

It was terrible to contemplate the possibility of losing an only son, but that did not weigh with either of them when their country's fate was in the balance. It was a crisis where one felt that one must be prepared to give all, and hold nothing back.

As a matter of fact Lady Campbell had been fretting at the delay though it was now only eleven days since the declaration of war. Like many other people she thought the war might be over in six months and that even if Aubrey succeeded in getting his commission, the delay of training might make him too late to take part.

On August 25th they heard of the retreat from Mons, and the people of England began to wake up. The whole country was covered with placards "Your King and Your Country want you," calling on men to enlist in the army that Kitchener was raising.

Sir Clarence came back in September with Major Robertson, having fixed up the boys all right. Both had commenced their training. Aubrey hoped eventually to get into one of the battalions of Guards who had done so splendidly at Mons, and Sinclair was trying for cavalry.

There had been no real chance for cavalry yet, but there probably soon would be, and Sinclair thought he had made the best choice.

Major Robertson was disappointed at not getting a job of any sort. It was sickening to the old soldier to be idle at such a time, but the War Office were quite unable to find anything suitable for a retired officer of fifty-eight, whose health was not too good, and who was handicapped by the effect of wounds received in earlier campaigns.

They offered to find him a job in the Censor's office, which he refused to have anything to do with, and he returned to Hurstcombe feeling very superfluous and miserable. Men who can't fight or even lend a hand to help feed the war machine are just a drag on the nation, eating day by day the same ration as a fighting man at a time when food was going to be scarce. There might even be a famine.

He shut himself up at Bothwell, neglecting his poultry and fruit to study his war maps and follow the movements of the various armies, pricked out with small flags on his big scale map.

He hardly went out at all except to take exercise, and he avoided all social engagements, even declining Lady Campbell's annual invitation for Christmas, at which she was a little offended.

Christmas at Highfields was very different from the jolly Christmas of last year, but still it was very pleasant and the younger people enjoyed themselves thoroughly.

Aubrey and Sinclair were down for a few days, full of amusing stories to tell in connection with their training.

Mary had got away also from a big hospital in London where she held an important post.

Isabel and Peggy had applied to undergo nursing training but were not to join till January.

Beatrice wanted to go with them, but her mother refused her permission. It was ridiculous for a girl of seventeen to suggest nursing, and it was not likely she would be accepted at that age. She felt very sore at being out of it all, but she could sympathise with her mother's dislike of being left quite alone at Upton Green.

It was some compensation at any rate to be allowed to leave school, and to look after her mother, and there were all sorts of war jobs with which she could help in the village. So few of the young people were left, and Mrs. Carford who was busy all day over various tasks connected with the making up of bandages and sending gifts to the soldiers at the front, was very glad to have her help.

Winter seemed unusually long that year with everyone waiting for the news that never came, of a brilliant victory at the front.

Seven months had passed since the Germans set out to conquer the world. They hadn't done it yet but the war conditions seemed generally in their favour.

Still there was nothing at all in the nature of a feeling of despondency. People were rather depressed at the prospect of a long war, but they never doubted as to the ultimate issue.

England had gone into the war soberly and solemnly, without the ringing of bells, the waving of flags and the shouting of hurrahs. She suffered therefore no revulsion of feeling when after all these long months there was no sign of victory.

Soon after the declaration of war, Major Tom Robertson was in Teignmouth station when a troop train from somewhere to somewhere pulled up at the platform. One of the first units on their way to France.

People on the platform looked at the soldiers and smiled, and the soldiers smiled back again.

Porters cracked a few jokes with the men, and the train passed on.

The old Major had longed to give the men a cheer,

and so had doubtless all the other people on the platform, but a stronger spirit restrained them and the train moved off in silence as if it were an ordinary passenger train bound for an ordinary destination.

A foreigner looking on would have spoken of the "apathy" of the people. But it was the very reverse, a deep feeling of the solemnity of the times, an atmosphere in which cheers seemed vulgar and inappropriate.

Fritz had started gaily on the war, borne towards a phantom victory on a flood of champagne and beer, garlanded with wreaths of choice flowers, and inspired with sentimental *Volkslieder* and the Hymn of Hate.

Thomas Atkins had marched to meet him in a spirit of dogged determination singing "Tipperary" and "'Ullo! 'Ullo! 'Oo's your lady friend?" And now, seven months later, the British spirit had not changed. A united people were pressing shoulder to shoulder towards some distant goal, quietly and irresistibly.

But the German spirit had had to change. You can't keep on singing songs of victory, when there isn't any victory to sing about. After their setback on the Marne, and their later inability to push forward on their western front, the revulsion in feeling was terribly upsetting to the morale of the whole nation.

It was a splendid thing to be a German on August 3rd, 1914, but it was quite another thing to be a German on September 10th, 1914.

But from August 4th, 1914 to November 11th, 1918 it was a splendid thing to be an Englishman

all the time. There never was a moment when it was not, even when things looked their blackest.

The whole Empire responded to the call, to the amazement of the Germans who had thought that England's entry into the war would be the signal for the dismemberment of that great Commonwealth of Nations.

The English counties rallied to the standard, and Lancashire was well to the fore among them.

But in Lancashire stayed John Cole, eating his heart out, and apparently deaf to his country's call.

His former C.O. had written to him asking him to apply to come back to them and he had had to write an evasive reply.

The cult of the "white feather" had begun, and he had to endure in silence the intolerable insult of being offered a white feather by contemptuous maidens.

His thoughts were very bitter. Not against his mother—God forbid—but just in the abstract against the general order of things that muddled up the destiny of children with that of their parents. Not to be able, at the age of twenty-seven, to have the control of one's own life !

This war had brought into being a new category of human beings called "Conscientious Objectors." At least he thought they were new, but quite likely they existed in the days of Rome, and before that under the earliest social systems.

Still, they were new in this sense, that modern civilisation prevented their being put to the test, and a man had to be believed to have conscientious objections because he said he had. In the old days

there was no doubt as to their being genuine because their attitude led to martyrdom and death.

He conceived that out of a hundred such men at the present day, ten might be genuine, and the other ninety were just either poltroons or men who had a natural tendency to refuse to do anything they were told to—men with an insane idea of the meaning of individual liberty.

He honoured the ten, while disagreeing with them, but considered the ninety to be the slimiest sort of reptiles that had ever polluted the face of God's earth.

And now he was supposed to be one of them ! It was bad enough that his comrades should regard him in that light, but he was tempted beyond the limits of endurance when the conscientious objectors showed a tendency to claim him as a suffering brother. Then the storm of his rage broke forth and he said bitter, insulting things adorned with adjectives and expressions he did not know he had in his vocabulary.

Mrs. Carford frequently called to see Mrs. Cole whose strength was fast ebbing. On one occasion when they were discussing the war Mrs. Carford expressed her surprise at John not having joined up.

"Such a fine, manly young fellow," she said to his mother. "I should have thought he would have been the first to offer himself. Why, he used to hold a commission in the Territorials, didn't he ?"

Then Mrs. Cole told her all about it. How John had indeed been among the first to offer his services, but out of love for his mother had withdrawn his application. If she could bring herself to believe that war was in any sense justifiable she would have gladly

let her son go. She could tolerate the thought of his losing his life. Her Christian belief would enable her to bear that. But it was the thought of his taking other men's lives, thereby condemning his own soul to eternal punishment, that was so terrible to her.

John had never agreed with his father and herself on this subject, but his sense of duty and love had given him strength to accept his parents' decision.

She liked Mrs. Carford to know just how things stood, as she knew she was fond of her John, but she wished her not to speak to others on the subject. It would be dreadful to think that the matter might become a subject of common discussion in the village.

Mrs. Carford was shocked and amazed. She murmured a few words of mild dissent, but could not find it in her heart to attack the erroneous belief of this poor dying woman. She could do nothing, so she would say nothing. But she felt a yearning sympathy for poor John.

In July John came down to stay at Fir Grove for a month. The firm were very busy carrying out large orders for Government, but John was sick at heart and felt as if the drudgery of his work would drive him insane. Henry could manage to carry on for a time without him, and agreed that he would be better for a change.

Mrs. Carford at once enlisted his services on behalf of her many war occupations ; most of the work was distinctly woman's work, but there was a certain amount of lifting of heavy weights, nailing up packing cases and conveying things to the station, that could be better done by a man. John was about the only

young man left in that part of the country—too well he knew it to his sorrow—and his help was invaluable.

The Ladies' Committee, who helped the Vicar's wife, included most of the prominent people in the village. They all liked to feel they were doing something, though many of them acquired this feeling while doing nothing. Mrs. Prenter and Beatrice Mandersfield were two on whom Mrs. Carford could always rely—punctual in attendance and untiring in zeal—but of the others she never could be certain whether they would turn up or not, or whether they would stay when they had come.

Like the women of the village John was glad of something to do—any blessed thing—as long as he could feel he was helping in the smallest way. It was a measley sort of job for a young man of high spirit in war time, doing sort of "help" to a parcel of women, but anything was better than nothing. But the unavoidable comparison between what he was doing and what he ought to be doing, accentuated the bitterness of his mind. It was torture. It was almost unendurable.

CHAPTER X

IN the first morning of John's taking up his "war work"—as he called it to himself in bitter sarcasm—he was alone with Mrs. Carford. It was a Monday, a day on which her helpers were excused attendance on account of its being washing-day and a day of general fussing in most households.

There was lots for him to do, and he ended his day's work by taking a consignment of packages down to the station for despatch.

On the next day there was a full attendance, and he was kept very busy lifting bales and bundles and doing clerical work.

Mrs. Carford had wisely determined to make use of his business training, and get him to organise the various departments on a proper footing, so she invited him to give Beatrice, who was acting as a sort of general secretary, some idea of the correct method of keeping accounts.

He was seated at the table glancing through the books when she came up with Beatrice.

"I've asked Mr. Cole here to show us how these accounts ought to be done," she said, "and he will give you an idea of what is needed. You know each other, of course."

John had risen from his seat as he heard Mrs. Carford speaking and he turned to face them with a smile. "I have met Miss Mandersfield before," he said in a rather nervous manner, and as he went on

to add some polite sentence Beatrice cut him short with, "Of course, Mr. Cole, I remember you quite well. How nice it is of you to come and help us."

John seated her at the table and began explaining the very simple method of keeping the business papers in order. She was quick at picking up his methods, and he suggested that the best thing would be for her to start the secretarial work on the new lines from the next day and appeal to him on any doubtful point. This would enable her to have the thing at her fingers' ends by the time he had to leave Hurstcombe.

Walking home that evening John mused on the events of the day. But to his mind there were no events—just one event—Beatrice.

Emily had chaffed him last year on the subject of love at first sight. But she was absolutely right. He could not disguise from himself the fact that he was intensely, madly, in love with this girl, whom he hardly knew. Foolishness? Yes, but that didn't alter things. There was no getting away from the fact that he did love her with all the intensity of his manhood—an unreasoning love dating from the moment of their first meeting.

He felt that he was the sport of Fate. Was it not cruel enough that he should be prevented from taking part in the war, to be shunned as a leper by his fellow-men? And now he was to endure the misery of a hopeless love. Hopeless indeed, as under no conceivable circumstances could Beatrice ever be his wife. There was no probability that she would even get as far as bestowing a single thought on him. And supposing that she ever came to love him as he loved her, which was unthinkable, their union would still

be almost impossible. He was proud enough of his family, but he knew they didn't count for much in the social scale, and in taking him for a husband she would be held to have married beneath her. Odious assumption.

He saw before him a vista of misery. Yet by an extraordinary contrast, he was filled with the most ecstatic pleasure. No one could rob him of the pure joy of loving, though he might never experience the complement of being loved.

He had never dwelt on the subject of love before, and he was confounded by the contradictions that arose in his mind. Misery and Joy.

Coming back to his sober senses as he neared the entrance to Fir Grove, he almost laughed at himself. In love with a girl to whom he had spoken three times in his life, and who had never spoken to him except to ask questions on the subject of accounts! Not only in love, but going as far as considering the *pros* and *cons* of marriage.

"Well," he thought, "never mind the pain that the years may bring, let me thank God for the great gift of this all-absorbing love."

At Upton Green, Beatrice amused her mother by telling her of the day's doings.

"I'm going to be quite a professional secretary in future," she said, as they sat talking together after dinner. "Young Mr. Cole was there to-day and he showed me the proper way to keep an account of everything."

"Dear me," replied her mother, slightly raising her eyebrows, "is that the Mr. Cole they call The Bounder? It must have been rather an infliction."

"Not at all an infliction, mother, I assure you,

quite the reverse. He *is* the one they call The Bounder, but that was all owing to a mistake. It's the youngest brother really to whom that title should belong. This one is quite presentable ; in fact, distinctly nice."

Mrs. Mandersfield put the unvarying question of the day.

"What's he in, and why isn't he at the front ?"

"I don't know, mother. I think Mrs. Carford once told me he was in the Territorials."

"But surely you know enough about soldiers now to tell them from their uniform ?"

"He wasn't in uniform. He was in mufti."

"Rather peculiar," said her mother thoughtfully. "Not in uniform ? One doesn't see many able-bodied young men these days not in uniform."

"Oh, I suppose he's on leave, and they're not obliged to wear uniform on leave, are they ?" said Beatrice as she rose from her chair. "I'm just going to get my account books to show you," she added, as she turned to leave the room.

In a few moments she came back and, spreading the books out on the table, entered into a detailed explanation of her secretarial duties. Mrs. Mandersfield, smiling at her display of clerical enthusiasm, feigned to be deeply interested, and suppressed an occasional inclination to yawn.

To John Cole the remaining days of his month's leave flew by like a dream. He was so utterly overwhelmed by his love that he was almost able for the time to forget its hopelessness. Just to be near Beatrice, to see her, to speak to her, to hear her voice, filled him with the most intense rapture.

If Beatrice had in the smallest degree returned his

affection, she could not have failed to notice the adoration in his eyes, though he kept himself under the strictest restraint. But her mind was focused entirely on her work, and John, her helper and instructor, was just that and nothing more.

If she had ever stopped to think of him apart from this capacity, she might now and then have caught his eye and wondered if its expression was purely connected with business, but she did not stop to think, nor did she look into his eyes. And John would not have wished her to. He had no desire that she should have any inkling of his feelings.

Beatrice may have had an indefinite sense of pleasure in the company of this handsome young man. She certainly did notice in quite a casual way that he had rather nice brown hair, with just a tendency to curl, and that he had extraordinarily well-shaped hands—they might have been the hands of a musician.

In the course of his explanations, his hands were what she saw most of—pointing out errors to her, and writing up entries to show her how it should be done. She couldn't help thinking they were rather wonderful hands to belong to a man whose work lay, she supposed, in factories, where she imagined him beating bars of hot iron with big hammers or messing about in some way with greasy machinery.

And she thought it hard luck that he should have been unjustly given the nickname of "The Bounder" when he was nothing of the sort. She remembered old Mrs. Biddlecombe's account of the dog incident. He had really behaved quite splendidly over that, and it had been most unfairly misrepresented as being a rather disreputable affair.

On the last afternoon of his stay in Hurstcombe, they left the Vicarage together when the day's work was over. They were both walking, and John asked if he might see her as far as Upton Green. She had no objection to his coming along ; in fact, she remembered there were one or two things about which she wanted to ask him, so she gladly assented.

John was a vivacious talker, and he had a pleasant voice. She liked listening to him as he spoke on various things connected with the war. She smiled to herself as she pictured Aubrey meeting them as they walked side by side down the lane. Dear old Aubrey, what a shock it would give him ! She was glad there was no chance of running into him. He was so impetuous and would have been certain to do something silly.

As they reached the entrance to Fir Grove she suddenly remembered that she had not yet asked him what unit he belonged to.

" Are you off now to join your regiment ? " She turned and faced him as she spoke. " You were lucky to get leave just now. What are you in ? "

" I'm in nothing," he replied with the least trace of confusion. " I'm still a civilian."

" What *do* you mean, Mr. Cole ? " she asked in incredulous tones. " Do you mean to say that you haven't joined up yet ? And the war has been going on for a year. Did the doctors refuse you ? "

" No. It was not the doctors. I am very fit indeed and I can assure you that I desire nothing more than to get into uniform. I was in the Territorials before the war. I resigned my commission for certain reasons, and the same reasons prevent me from asking to rejoin now."

“ Are the reasons very secret, or may one ask what they are ? ”

“ Well, yes, they’re secret in a way. They certainly refer to matters about which I cannot speak.”

Oh, how his heart burned within him. He longed to explain everything to her. But it would sound so pitiful—if she had no sympathetic understanding—and he detected no trace of sympathy in her voice or expression. It would make things seem even worse than they were—sheltering himself behind his mother’s petticoats.

“ It’s hard to imagine reasons of any sort—secret or otherwise,” said Beatrice in a hard voice. “ It must be dreadful to be a man and not play a man’s part. I’m sorry for you.”

“ Good-bye,” she added, suddenly holding out her hand.

John shook hands and remained standing for a few moments at the gate, looking wistfully after the retreating figure as Beatrice pursued her way to Upton Green.

As he turned into the house his thoughts were full of her. It was dreadful not to have been able to explain to her exactly how things stood, but it couldn’t be done. Offering to shake hands was kind of her ; it showed that she had not jumped to the very worst conclusions. Still, it was only a simple act of common politeness. But how much more to him. The first time he had ever touched that darling hand, and possibly the last. But his fingers seemed to tingle still.

Beatrice wondered to herself why she had shaken hands with “ that young man.” It was just a natural impulse. Still one must remember that

these Coles were to be kept at arms' length, and this particular member of that family might almost be regarded as outside the pale of decent society. A man who, a year after the declaration of war, had not joined up and couldn't tell you why.

John Cole said good-bye to his mother that night and got away to the north by an early train.

CHAPTER XI

IN August Isabel and Peggy came down to Highfields for ten days. They had been doing a lot of really hard work and hoped soon to qualify, and be attached to one of the hospitals in France.

Peggy sympathised with Beatrice at being left, so to speak, all alone in the village, tied down to such humdrum work, and Beatrice felt she really needed the sympathy. She asked Peggy to come down with her one morning and help Mrs. Carford, and arranged to call for her and drive her down in the car.

At the Vicarage Mrs. Carford welcomed the two girls. "It quite cheers one up, Peggy, to see you and Isabel back even if it's only for a few days," she said with a rather sad smile. "Our work here is dull compared to the life of adventure you lead, but it's our lot, and we've all of us just got to fit in where we can; we mustn't complain."

"I'm going to show her round," said Beatrice. "Come along, Peg. With all your swank about lectures and demonstrations and exams you don't know what real work is. We do."

She took her first into the store-room, explaining the general arrangements with pride.

"Here you have everything to hand just as required," said Beatrice, with a graceful sweep of her arm. "No. 1.—Bulk materials to be made up as

needed. No. 2.—Sewing and knitting materials. No. 3.—Articles made up ready for despatch. No. 4.—Gift articles, sent in to us ready made up.”

“ I say,” Peggy interrupted, “ may one look a gift article in the mouth ? ” and she began to turn over some of the articles. “ Poor soldiers at the front ! Will these things be issued to them by their Commanding Officers, and will they be punished if they don’t wear them ? Here’s a sock with the foot longer than the leg, and about eighteen inches long at that. What a solace for a lad with corns and bunions. And look at this lovely Balaclava cap knitted in violet wool ! What a size—certainly adapted for a swollen head. Will you label it for the C.O. or for the last joined subaltern, or will they toss for it ? ”

“ They certainly are weird, aren’t they ? We would really have liked to have kept them for a war museum, but you can’t hurt people’s feelings. They are knitted by people with the kindest of motives. The village things are usually beautifully done, but those monstrosities are worked by high-born dames who know very little of knitting, but feel they must be doing something to help the dear lads at the front. It’s really very nice of them. When we can we unpick them and use the wool again. Sometimes the perpetrator keeps an eye on them and we have to send them off. Then I hear that when they are distributed at the front, the majority are passed on at once to the kindly French people in whose houses the men are billeted. So it pans out all right in the end. They are mostly winter things, anyway, and won’t be going out till October, and the war may be over by then.”

"I *don't* think," said Peggy. "Well, pass along and show us the rest."

"Here's No. 5.—Perishable articles. Jam, pickles, and so on. No. 6.—Articles made up into lots ready for packing. No. 7.—Packing materials. That finishes the stores. Now come and see my office."

Peggy was amazed at the simplicity and neatness of the office arrangements.

"This book," Beatrice explained, picking up a large account book, "shows all our financial transactions. Money received by donations, money from sales of various kinds, expenses for purchase of materials, cost of despatching, etc. Here's a book that contains an account of material issued to be made up, here's another that shows how despatched, and when, and so on."

"Goodness, Beatrice," said Peggy, in genuine admiration. "You're jolly good at this sort of thing. I never should have thought it. Quite the little business lady!"

"Yes, we've got it pretty ship-shape now; it was in a bit of a muddle at first, but Mr. Cole was down here last month and put things in order for us."

"You don't say so. Good, kind Mr. Cole. That's his idea of war work, I suppose. It's nicer to help ladies arrange bundles of socks and bandages than to sit in muddy trenches waiting for a Hun to shoot you, isn't it?"

"Oh, I think you're a little hard on him. I believe he wants to join up but for some reason he can't."

"Rubbish, my dear Beatrice, rubbish. If a man's a man he joins up, and that's all there is about it. This Cole man used to be called The Bounder. From what I hear in the village he has relinquished that

title in favour of the more up-to-date one of the Conscientious Objector. What a worm ! ”

“ I’ve heard of these Conscientious Objectors. Can such people really be ? ” said Beatrice.

“ Can they be ? Oh, yes, they can, very much, I’m afraid. Worse luck. I wish they couldn’t be.” Peggy replied with heat. “ The genuine ones are, I suppose, a mixture of obstinacy and mistaken notion of religion or ethics. If there are any genuine ones. The others one can’t really trust oneself to speak of. It’s hard luck that Hurstcombe should have one of them. Not Hurstcombe people, anyway, thank goodness.”

After completing her inspection of the general arrangements at the Vicarage and telling Mrs. Carford in the correct manner of an inspecting officer that she would be glad to send in a favourable report, Peggy entertained Beatrice for half an hour with accounts of various “ rags ” in which she and Isabel had taken part, and amusing descriptions of her nursing experiences, and then left her to get on with the day’s work.

Several entries had to be made in the different books, a task which naturally kept John Cole in Beatrice’s thoughts. So The Bounder was now something much worse. His original nickname had been a cruel injustice, but the new name was not a nickname and, being merely an accurate designation of a certain class of human beings, couldn’t be unjust. She thought of his last words to her, something about reasons he wouldn’t like to explain. Of course he wouldn’t. Who would ? She wished she hadn’t shaken hands with him. She certainly would not if she had known. She loathed the idea of conscien-

tious objection, but she almost felt sorry for him. It must be so dreadful to be like that.

Major Roberston came round to the Vicarage to tea and walked home with Beatrice afterwards. She asked him what he thought about these conscientious objectors.

"It's a difficult subject," he said. "As a soldier I ought to say, as soldiers usually do, 'they ought to be shot.' But I don't feel like that. If you could only separate the genuine one from the ninety-nine humbugs, I'd gladly shoot the latter, but I'd have some respect for the former. The genuine ones are people, I take it, with an exaggerated notion of what is called, I believe, their 'ego.' They go through life in a perpetual minority of one. In war time it takes this form of refusing to fight. In peace time the same class of mind refuses to accept vaccination because most people are vaccinated and the State tries to compel you to be vaccinated. There'd be more sense in it if they turned their attention to something really practical and refused to pay income tax. What's set you thinking about it?"

"They say that Mr. Cole, who helped us so much at the Vicarage last month, is one of them," said Beatrice. "It seems rather a pity. We wish now we had never had his help."

"Nonsense," replied her godfather quite angrily. "I never heard such stuff in my life. Another example of the silliness of village talk. I wouldn't mind betting there's some other reason for his not getting into uniform. He always struck me as a first-rate, manly young fellow. There's nothing of the cur about him, I'll swear."

They reached Upton Green just before sunset, and

Major Robertson said good-bye at the gate, after arranging for Beatrice and her mother to come over to Bothwell on Sunday and admire his White Wyandottes, the finest in the county.

At Fir Grove, Mr. Cole was beginning to be alarmed at his wife's state. In August she had seemed to be really getting stronger, and now she had suddenly taken a turn for the worse. The doctor spoke very gravely of her condition, and suggested that the family should be warned so that a wire could bring them to Fir Grove at short notice.

On September 15th Mr. Cole accordingly wrote to all of them. In his letter to John he said : " . . . She is not suffering any great pain, I am glad to say, and keeps quite conscious. But I fear the end is not far off. It will be some reward to you for your devotion in abstaining from military service to know that that is her chief sustaining happiness. She says over over and over again, ' I thank God that none of my dear sons has taken part in this wicked war. None guilty of taking a fellow-man's life.' If it be God's will to take her from us now, I feel sure you will adhere to your resolution out of respect and love for her. . . ."

On September 17th Mr. Cole wired to John that his mother had died suddenly.

On the same day John sent two telegrams, one to his father announcing his arrival by the earliest possible train, and one to the military authorities asking what steps he should take to regain his commission in his old regiment.

The entire family gathered at Fir Grove for the funeral. Mrs. Cole had been a devoted wife and loving mother, and was very sincerely mourned.

Mr. Cole, holding very firmly to the Christian belief that the parting was only for a time, was not overwhelmed by grief, though no certainty of the future could really balance the pain of the present loss. Even with the faith that makes one's knowledge of the future a certainty, one still remains humanly inconsolable in bereavement.

John refrained for a week before broaching the subject of military service to his father. It was a terrible thing to have to add to his grief at such a time, but it had to be done, and the sooner the better.

"I want to speak to you, father, about my own affairs," he said, as they rose from the breakfast table, "could you spare me a few minutes ?"

"Certainly, John," replied his father, leading the way to the library. "I'll sit down and light a pipe while you talk."

"I hope I shall not be upsetting you very much, and it's bad luck that I should have to bother you at all just now," said John as his father seated himself, "but I must tell you that as my abstention from military service was solely due to a promise given to my mother, I now consider myself released from that promise, and intend to join up at once."

Mr. Cole started as if to rise from his chair, but John laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Please, father, do not let this shock you," he said, "and please let us talk quite quietly about it."

"Talk quietly, indeed ! Am I to listen unmoved to the announcement of your betrayal of your mother's trust ? Do you believe that because she has left us, she no longer sees us ? Are the bonds of love and affection severed by death ?"

“ I do not believe that the bonds of love are severed by death, but I *do* believe that if she is now aware of my intentions, she is in possession of the greater knowledge, unhampered by earthly views, and will know that she was wrong ever to have stood between me and my manifest duty.”

“ How dare you speak in condemnation of your mother ? ”

“ I’m sorry, father. I meant no condemnation. I only meant that I am certain that when we enter a higher state after death, our views on earthly matters—if earthly matters retain any interest for us at all—are quite certain to be different from those we held while on earth.”

“ Well, let’s leave your mother out of it. Two questions remain. Are you a Christian ? Can Christians take up arms to kill their fellow-men under any circumstances whatever ? ”

“ I can answer those two questions without any hesitation. I am certainly a Christian, and I try to follow the teaching of Christ. As regards the second question, it is really two questions, because two interests are involved—that of the individual and that of the State. From the individual point of view, I know that I am right in taking up arms to defend my country ; and that protection may necessitate the killing of evil people who threaten to molest my country. From the State point of view I hold that it is my duty to identify myself with the State. If the State is at war, I am at war.”

Mr. Cole disagreed entirely from John’s interpretation of a Christian’s duty in time of war, and quoted many texts to prove his argument that no man could shed blood and be a Christian.

"It's no use, father, I'm afraid," said John. "I read the Bible, but not as you do, and I cannot quote any passages with accuracy. But I am quite certain that I have the gist of Christ's teaching in my mind. You dwell on texts that seem to me to mean no more than 'Thou shalt not be the aggressor,' and I take none of them to mean 'Thou shalt not defend thy country against the aggressor.'"

"When I read that our Lord told us to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and St. Peter said, 'submit yourself to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake,' I cannot escape the conclusion that we are meant to do what the State tells us to do.

"Also, quite apart from texts, I just feel that I want to go and fight. I am not a bit pugnacious, as you know, but I cannot help being a man and an Englishman, and, right or wrong, I will fight for my country."

"Then there's nothing more to be said," rejoined Mr. Cole, as he rose from his chair. "You have embittered my life, and I can only pray that you may be forgiven as I forgive you. Let us speak no more about the matter."

The family gathering was to break up on the following day. Henry Cole and his wife were returning to Lancashire. John was going to London to make arrangements for joining, and Percy was returning with him. Emily was to stay on for a time to look after the house for her father.

John thought he would like to go down to the Vicarage and see how the work was getting on. So he presented himself to Mrs. Carford after lunch and asked if he could be of any use.

Mrs. Carford referred sympathetically to Mrs. Cole's

death, and dwelt on the fact that she would be a great loss to the parish.

John was not aware that she knew of his promise to his mother, but he took the opportunity of saying that her death had given him complete liberty of action, and he hoped to be in the army in a few weeks' time.

"I'm so glad, John," replied Mrs. Carford. "People in the village have been saying unkind things about you, but I won't give you the details of their tittle-tattle. Come and see how well we're doing. Here's Miss Mandersfield, our highly-trained and indefatigable secretary."

As they entered the room where she was working, Beatrice rose, smiling at Mrs. Carford, and merely acknowledging John's presence with the faintest of nods.

John hoped that she would talk over things with him and show him how she had been getting on with the books, but to his dismay she turned and left the room, saying to Mrs. Carford :

"I'll be back in half an hour. I've just got to get home for a minute or two. Something I forgot to tell mother."

John seemed to rather lose interest in things when she had gone. He glanced over the books and the store cupboards, and then excused himself on the grounds that as he was leaving to-morrow he would be very busy at home.

What difficult things our Christian duties are ! Here was John, a good Christian, telling lies with quiet complacency. He was not going home, and he was not busy. Instead he went for a long walk on the moor, thinking of Beatrice, and his hopeless

love for her, and the look of dislike and contempt on her face when he met her just now. Hard luck to be hated by the person you love. What a rotten world it was. There was no reason, of course, why Beatrice should take the faintest interest in him, but to hate him. Why ? What had he done ? Was it only because she was a haughty Mandersfield and he was a humble Cole ? No, that would have merely led to polite ignoring. But there was no mistaking the active dislike manifested in her expression.

Beatrice returned to the Vicarage about four o'clock and busied herself unnoticed in the little room where she kept her books. She could hear the hum of conversation in the next room through the half-open door.

"That awful man was here this afternoon," she heard someone say. "I wonder he has the cheek to show his face."

"Who do you mean ?" asked another voice.

"Who ? Why, Johnny Coalhole, the Conscientious Bounder, or the Bounding Objector."

"Is he really as bad as that ?"

"Oh, he's a first-class swine," added a male voice, "too good and proper to fight for his country. Much nicer to stay loafing at home."

Then Beatrice heard Mrs. Carford interrupting the conversation :

"Please don't talk like that," she said in a quiet voice. "It is really rather presumption to judge our fellow-men." Then she suddenly added in quite a fierce tone :

"How dare you speak like that of John Cole ? I happen to know the exact reasons why he has not joined up yet, and I can tell you that they

do him the greatest honour. If it had not been for them he would have been a soldier from the first day of the war. The reasons were removed a few days ago and he has gone at once to offer his services. Do let us try to think more kindly of our neighbours."

The conversation lapsed into commonplaces, and Beatrice joined the party.

When they broke up after tea the talkers proceeded to tell their friends and neighbours of Mrs. Carford's surprising announcement. But they gave the information in rather different terms, and the news that reached the village was to the effect that Mr. John Cole, who used to be a Conscientious Objector, had decided to join up at last, probably because he heard that compulsory service was being introduced and he would either have to join the army or go to gaol.

Beatrice wanted to put the whole matter out of her mind. She hated being always compelled, against her will, to let her thoughts dwell on this nonentity, John Cole. But somehow she couldn't escape from it and now she was thinking hard about abstract subjects such as "hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness," and the abstracts revolved around the concrete form of John Cole.

CHAPTER XII

IN October Aubrey and Sinclair came down to Hurstcombe to say good-bye.

Aubrey was going over in ten days' time to join his regiment in France. Sinclair was still stuck at a training camp, but hoping soon to get out of England.

Aubrey was inclined to crow over being the first to get away, but Sinclair retorted that it only took a few weeks to train an infantryman, but it was a much more serious affair to train a cavalryman. Although he had not received any orders he had been told that they might come any minute, and when they did he'd have to leave in a hurry, so he took the opportunity of coming down with Aubrey.

Isabel and Peggy managed to get away too, and it was a jolly week at Highfields. Mrs. Mandersfield and Beatrice were over there a great deal, and everybody was in the gay and frivolous mood that the anxieties and tragedies of war always produce. Nature's balance again. The more tragedy, the more comedy. The more solemnity, the more frivolity.

Sinclair thought his sister a very pretty girl, but she was nowhere in comparison with Isabel. Peggy wasn't so divinely handsome as Isabel, but she was such a jolly good sort.

Aubrey thought his sisters quite nice-looking but not a patch on Beatrice.

A casual observer might have thought them all equally attractive.

Isabel, tall and graceful, with the dark hair and eyes of her father. Peggy also dark, but rather shorter, with a beautifully proportioned, athletic frame, and a twinkle in her eyes that justified Sinclair's opinion of her—a jolly good sort.

Beatrice was a contrast to both of them, smaller than the usual type of English girl. She had very finely-cut features, with a perfect complexion, and her hair was described by her godfather in poetic mood as being like "burnished gold, touched by the rays of the setting sun." It certainly was most beautiful hair, of a pure gold colour; there was hardly a trace of red in it, but it was what might be called a "red-gold," for want of a better description.

Both the young men looked very well in uniform. They liked to get out of it as often as they could, but the girls were unanimously of the opinion that they looked much nicer in it.

After tennis and tea on the last day of the joyous week, Aubrey walked with Beatrice to Upton Green. It was a lovely autumn day, and it seemed hard to realise that only a few miles away men were engaged day and night in killing each other in tens of thousands.

"I'm awfully glad to be off at last," said Aubrey, glancing down at the figure by his side; "but one hates leaving you all behind. God knows when we shall meet again."

"Yes. I'm glad you're going, too," Beatrice replied in a rather shaky voice. "It will be dreadful here when you are all gone, but we've just got to endure it. I hate the idea of you and Sinclair going,

and yet I'm glad. One can't explain these things, but you know what I mean. I wouldn't lift a finger to stop any man I loved from offering his life for his country."

"That's nice of you in two ways," Aubrey rejoined in a chaffing tone. "Nice to know you have the proper patriotic spirit, and nice to know you love me."

"You know I love you, dear old Aubrey. Always have loved you, haven't I?"

"Yes, but I don't mean quite that brother-and-sister sort of love."

"Oh, I see. Well, I don't know. I'll think it over. I hadn't realised there were lots of different kinds of love. I think you're the nicest man I ever met, and quite the best looking."

"Thanks! That's a good beginning, anyway. I've never loved anyone but you, and I never shall so please remember that."

"I shall certainly remember that. Well, here we are at home, and here's the car coming with mother."

Aubrey thought it rather stupid of Mrs. Mandersfield to turn up in that way; mothers always do spoil sport. Still, it was perhaps just as well. He had been on the verge of making a serious proposal and that would have been silly. It's better not to let oneself be tied down. Beatrice really was delightful, and it had always seemed to be an understood thing in the two families that he and she should marry. So they would, he hoped, in the end, but one didn't want to hurry things too much. He had gone rather far with Dora Maynard the last time they were together in London, and then she'd had a row with him over his attachment to that pretty little Mrs.

Elkington, the most adorable creature in the world. One must not have too many strings to one's bow. Well, everything would come right in the end.

Beatrice said good-bye to Aubrey with tearful eyes, and walked up the drive with her mother.

Sinclair stayed to dine at Highfields, and Beatrice and her mother dined quietly together, chatting over the events of the day.

After dinner they sat in the drawing-room, Mrs. Mandersfield reading, and Beatrice knitting.

Thoughts of Aubrey flitted through her mind.

What a handsome fellow he was. Over six feet high and broad and muscular. She didn't like fair men, as a rule, but Aubrey was sort of betwixt and between. He wasn't so very fair, and his hair was more brown than golden. One seldom spoke of men with "golden" hair, but lots of them had it. The expression came to her mind, "as handsome as a Greek god." Yes, that was his type. She didn't know what Greek gods were like, but no more do most people who use that expression. It just summed up, in some indefinite sort of way, the sort of man Aubrey was.

The young people at Highfields had a very jolly evening. Sinclair thoroughly enjoyed himself, but there was a serious side to his enjoyment. He would soon be off to the wars, and might never come back. He had the normal desire of the soldier for the "girl I left behind me." Rather vulgarised in these latter days but in essence the same romantic feeling as that which inspired the knights in the days of chivalry when they rode to battle bearing the glove or handkerchief of their lady-love as an emblem of victory and triumph.

But his feelings were distinctly polygamous. If only he belonged to some Asiatic faith, he could say to both Isabel and Peggy : " Be mine."

As it was, he felt that simply couldn't be done. Yet he loved them both, or thought he did. And he hoped that they both loved him.

If he had to choose between the two, perhaps he loved Peggy the best. And he was a year younger than Isabel. But he and Isabel had always been so much together. " Anyway," he thought, " mother always talks of Isabel and me."

Thus inspired, he seized an opportunity of speaking to her when they found themselves in a quiet corner during a pause in the amusements.

" I say, Isabel," he said rather hesitatingly, " I shan't see you again, I expect, for a good long time. I shall be fighting somewhere or another for King and Country, and you'll be nursing, I suppose, in some hospital. It would be rather fine if we ran across each other. I the wounded hero and you the soothing nurse."

" It would be fun to meet like that," she replied, " But don't talk of such horrid things as being wounded."

" Oh, well I don't want to get gloomy about it, but it's not often that a junior officer at the front escapes being wounded. I only wanted to say that I shall always be thinking of meeting you again."

" And I shall always be thinking of you, Sinclair, wherever you may be."

" Darling Isabel. It will be nice to know that. I've always loved you since I was a kid, and I hoped you felt the same way."

" Oh, Sinclair, of course I do. But I think Peggy does, too. And I thought perhaps you were in love with her."

" Yes. I can't help loving Peggy. But somehow that's different. You've always been the real one."

" I like to think that, Sinclair, but I can't quite follow your ideas of real and unreal love."

" I never said anything about 'unreal' love."

" No, but you said something about 'real' love, and that implies the existence of some other sort of love that would be 'unreal.' I'm sorry if I muddle you."

" Well, don't let's tear the thing to pieces. All I mean is that before I go off to the war I'd like to know you felt as I do about it."

" That's all right, Sinclair. You know my love for you is very real, and I shall always be thinking of you wherever you are."

Later in the evening he found himself thrown together with Peggy, and without realising quite what he was doing, said very much the same thing to her, getting a rather similar reply. But there was an intensity in Peggy's voice that made it seem different.

Next morning in the train on his way to London with Aubrey he felt rather confused. Had he proposed to Isabel ?—or to Peggy ?—or to both ? No, hang it all, it wasn't as bad as that. You couldn't call that a proposal. Yet he had a sort of guilty feeling that he had been playing with things that were not playthings. However, he was off to the wars now, so what did it matter. Later on he could see how things worked out. He loved Isabel, but he couldn't not love Peggy. Meantime, it was no

use worrying. It was better to think of something else.

On November 1st, John Cole came down to Hurstcombe to say good-bye to his father and Emily. He had got his commission, but had not been appointed to the same Territorial regiment to which he had previously belonged. He was to join a battalion that was off to India, probably the North-West Frontier. Meantime he was training with a unit at Aldershot, and he took this opportunity of coming down to Fir Grove for a final leave-taking so that he could feel himself free from all family ties.

Mr. Cole had not altered his views on the subject of military service, but one cannot interfere with the designs of Providence, and he was resigned to take things as they were. He could not help feeling proud of his handsome son in his smart uniform, although his pride was tinged with sadness.

Emily thought her favourite brother quite the finest thing she had ever seen.

"I wish Henry had joined up, too," she said. "It would have done him a world of good. But he thinks the same as father does about these things, or pretends to. I believe he is at heart a bit of a humbug. I can't imagine our beloved brother dancing about on the battlefield 'midst shot and shell' with a rifle and bayonet in his hand and a fierce Bosch making faces at him in the distance."

John had come to Fir Grove undoubtedly with the dutiful intention of saying good-bye to his father, but at the back of his mind there was always the thought of Beatrice.

He must just see her sweet face once before he

went, even if he knew he should again find on it only an expression of dislike and contempt.

He did not aspire as far as even speaking to her. If she stopped and spoke to him he would probably have nothing to say to her except commonplaces about the weather.

The only thing he wanted to say to her was that he loved her, and that he would never say. It would be in every sense a wrong thing to do, almost an insult. No, if they met, he must content himself with silent worship of his goddess.

Alas, there was no hope of his even meeting her. He haunted the lanes and paths that lay between Upton Green and the village on the chance of seeing her coming from or going to the Vicarage.

Emily's observant eyes noticed that something was wrong but she hadn't the remotest idea what.

"What's the matter with you, John?" she said one evening as he came in from one more fruitless effort. "You always used to be a great walker on the moors. But now you seem to spend all your time going round and round in circles, like a retriever looking for a lost bird. Doesn't it make you giddy?"

"No, thanks, I don't feel any sensations of that sort," he replied. "I don't seem to care about long walks just now and as I must take exercise of some sort, I suppose I naturally fall into the way of taking these circular trips."

On the next afternoon as he walked hopelessly down the narrow road they called Honeysuckle Lane, his heart stopped beating for a moment as he saw Beatrice walking towards him. It was a fine day, and the lane ran due west so that the sun was full in

his eyes, dazzling him, but not preventing him from recognising that beloved figure at the first glance.

As they met Beatrice bowed slightly, returning his greeting without a smile. She held out her hand, however, and said : " How d'you do and good-bye, Mr. Cole. I hear you're off to the wars. I am so glad you joined up *at last*."

As John took her hand and released it, she made as if to move on, but, without actually barring her way, he did not step aside as she had expected. She did not want to be involved in a prolonged conversation with this Mr. Cole, but she also did not want to be actually rude to him. In the moment of her hesitation John took up the two words that constituted the sting of her otherwise kindly farewell.

" Please don't say, *at last*, like that, Miss Mandersfield. It is rather cruel. I know people were saying nasty things about me, but surely you didn't believe them."

" I really didn't mean to say anything unkind. I never in any case bother my head about the spiteful things they say in the village, especially about a comparative stranger."

" Oh, please, that's worse than what you said before. Honestly, Miss Mandersfield, you cannot say that I am in any sense a stranger."

Beatrice was annoyed at having been drawn into conversation. She wanted to get by and be done with it. She wished she had never stopped to speak to him at all. It was silly of her. A nod and a smile would have been quite sufficient. She felt angry with him for stopping her, and angry with herself at her inability to extricate herself.

" Good-bye again, Mr. Cole," she said, making a

slight forward movement. "I wish you the best of luck."

"Please stay for one moment longer," said John, breathing fast. "We shall probably never meet again. Will you wait and let me speak for once in my life. I want to tell you, Miss Mandersfield, that I love you—no, don't move," he implored, "you must hear me. I have loved you from the first moment I set eyes on your dear face. You may hate me if you will, I cannot help my love. It is nothing to you. How could it be ? But there it is. I love you, love you with every fibre of my being. And I shall never cease to love you, come what may. It is my life."

"How dare you !" said Beatrice, interrupting his passionate outpouring. "Only a cad would take the unfair advantage of this chance meeting to insult a woman."

"I am not a cad," he replied angrily, "and you know I am not. I have not taken an unfair advantage of you. I have always loved you, and had no intention of telling you of my love. I did not frame the words that offend you with my lips. They just came from my heart against my will. I am awfully sorry you should feel as you do about it, but I will not trouble you any more. Please remember all your life that I shall always love you ; and the knowledge of honest love cannot in any way injure the highest lady in the land, even if she does not return it. Good-bye."

Beatrice had literally fled, in amazement and anger.

John remained standing, equally in amazement. He had been in the skies and had come back to earth with a crash. What had he been doing ? What had

he been saying ? Simply telling Beatrice that he loved her, no less, no more. What tremendous impulse had inspired him to act in exactly the way he had firmly resolved not to act ? As Beatrice had said, he ought to be ashamed of himself for taking advantage of her in a chance meeting. But he felt no shame at all. He just felt a glow of rapture.

He continued this train of thought as he turned to walk home. What an inexplicable thing love was. His love had taken hold of him and made him do what it wanted, not what he wanted. Love triumphant had done the right thing where his weaker nature had determined on a wrong course. Splendid. He had told Beatrice that he loved her, and she had replied that he was a cad, and she hated him. That ought to fill him with sorrow and despair. But it didn't in the least. He had an indefinable feeling of triumph, based on instinct not on material evidence. The latter was against him at every point, but spiritual things transcend material. Looking at things as they were it seemed that they might never meet again, yet somehow or other, on this plane or another, her love *must* in the end respond to his. Why or how didn't matter ; it would be so.

Beatrice arrived home outwardly calm. She just mentioned to her mother that she had met Mr. John Cole and said good-bye to him.

"Dear me," said Mrs. Mandersfield, smiling sarcastically at her, "quite the village melodrama affair, I suppose. Young hero just off to the war. I saw him yesterday and thought he looked splendid in his uniform—really a very fine man, the Village Bounder. Was it a touching affair ? "

“ No, mother, not at all,” replied Beatrice, speaking truthfully, as she thought, of her own feelings. “ I shook hands with him and wished him good luck. He seemed inclined to be emotional, so I hurried on and left him standing.”

Her thoughts, that evening, insisted on dwelling on John, and the incident of the farewell. She had at first intended to tell her mother, but somehow that seemed rather mean. Now she wanted to put him out of her thoughts, but she could not.

Fancy his daring to propose to her in that violent fashion. Was ever a woman made love to in this manner ? To jump in one bound from trivial commonplaces to a passionate outpouring of love.

Beatrice was tremendously modern, but she was a woman, and as such, extremely ancient.

Twenty centuries of civilisation topped off with a little froth of modernity do not seriously affect the underlying human being—heir to two thousand centuries of primitive instincts.

The language of love alters—in one generation we address the object of our love as “ Queen of my heart,” in the next as “ Old Bean ”—but the essential emotions remain for ever unaltered.

Beatrice felt that it was ridiculous and insulting for a man to blurt out a declaration of love to a woman without a previous period of wooing or courting. But even mentally she could not have brought herself to use such obsolete Victorian terms—redolent of whiskers and macassar oil.

It is a pity that that beautiful word “ woo ” has been withered by the scorn of a scoffing age, surviving in these flippant days only by reason of the preservative effect of alliteration, in the expression “ to

be wooed and won." Up till a few hours ago John Cole had never spoken to her except on the subject of account books and weather prospects, and who could ever have foreseen the sudden transition to this sort of thing ?

In any case he was an odious brute. He was a liar to say he wasn't taking advantage of her. He was. Meeting her like that in the lane where she couldn't escape. Cad ! Oh, if only Aubrey had come up. She hated men fighting, but still this was an exceptional case ; she would have liked to have seen Aubrey knock John down. But it mightn't have come off. John was a pretty sturdy fellow, and he might have knocked Aubrey down. In books and on the stage the virtuous man never has any difficulty in flooring the villain, but in real life, does it come off ?

She was as good as engaged to Aubrey. He hadn't exactly proposed, but he had said that he loved her and would never love anyone else, and that was the same thing. It was a pity their engagement had not been announced, that would have made it impossible for John to have behaved in that odious way. However, that was done with. He was off to-morrow and she could put him out of her mind, thank goodness.

John left next day, but Beatrice found that she could not put him out of her mind.

He was a cad, and a brute, and he had insulted her. But there came into her mind a sense of pity for this young man. After all, it was rather hard luck on him. She remembered how handsome he had looked as he walked towards her in the lane, with the sun shining full on him. Not at all like a Greek god,

something much better—no, not better—that was silly, but quite different.

One would never have thought that such a decent-looking fellow could have been so mean. But was it really mean ? If a man loves a woman he may find it difficult to find the opportunity for telling her so. And he must be dying to tell her. In a way it was rather plucky of him—to dare to pour out his feelings like that. She didn't like John and she loved Aubrey. Still, thinking it over, it was not unpleasant to feel oneself an object of adoration to a young man who, under other circumstances and in different social conditions, might be considered "eminently desirable." And he really did love her. No doubt of that. How his eyes had flashed. A rather fierce sort of love. Aubrey had been much nicer and calmer—calmer, certainly, but "nicer" ?

CHAPTER XIII

FEBRUARY 8th, 1916, was Rose Garstin's twenty-fifth birthday, and there were great celebrations in the Bayswater boarding-house.

Rose had been training for a nurse and was celebrating to-day not only her birthday but her final success in qualifying.

She was to go shortly on one of the hospital ships, and hoped eventually to get over to France.

Life in London did not recall the war very much to one's mind, except that one saw fewer young men about and most of those one saw were in uniform. Food was expensive, but one could get most of the things one wanted, only sometimes one had to take a good deal of trouble to get them.

Fifty-nine people had been killed in the last Zeppelin raid, but that was four months ago and the Germans had done nothing in that way since, except a small and unsuccessful affair in Kent a fortnight ago. The inhabitants of London began to feel that the risk of air raids had been very much exaggerated, and, on the whole, they felt as comfortable as might be expected.

The boarding-house on this particular evening looked very bright and gay. As long as the shutters were up and the blinds down one could have plenty of light.

Mrs. Garstin had provided a special dinner for the boarders, and had a private party of six guests in her own little room. The guests included Percy

Cole, who still remained faithful to Rose without receiving much encouragement from her.

She had grown up into a most attractive young woman, and had kept her wholesome, fresh complexion in spite of London air. Her small, well-shaped nose had a fascinating little tilt, and her large, blue-grey eyes suggested to Percy an infinite capacity for love, a love that he failed to evoke.

Many young men, besides the young man in Ireland and Percy, had at various times been enthralled by those eyes and had offered themselves as suitors. But Rose was not seriously attracted by any of them, and none of them had appeared to Mrs. Garstin to be sufficiently desirable for her to wish Rose to encourage their advances. On the contrary, she had warned most of them off as undesirables.

Rose herself felt the capacity for love that her eyes were supposed to indicate, but she was not the sort of girl to give herself without love or to be attracted by a man merely because he was good-looking and amorous, and generally suitable, in the accepted sense, as a husband.

She really was very fond of Percy who, with all his vulgarity, had a lot of good points. But she knew that she could never love him and she was sorry for the hopelessness of his adoration.

He was looking very smart to-night. He had got his commission and had qualified as a pilot in the Royal Air Force, and hoped soon to be off to the front. His well-cut uniform suited him admirably, showing him at his best by eliminating the bad taste he invariably displayed when he allowed his fancy to run riot in civilian dress.

After dinner there was singing and dancing in the

drawing-room. Percy shone at both these accomplishments. He had a good voice and danced extremely well. The concert was opened by a weedy young man—who had not yet answered his country's call—singing, "I fear no foe in shining armour." Percy asked him sarcastically whether he would sing as an encore, "Yes, let me like a soldier fall."

One of the ladies sang some of the old English ballads, and this item was followed by a glee quartette.

Percy had a large repertoire of really good songs, but as he liked to amuse people rather than to enchant them he selected, "We're all single at the seaside," to start on, and followed it up with, "Archibald, certainly not."

Dancing to the gramophone went on till midnight. Percy danced several times with Rose, holding her rather tighter than she liked to be held, and making furious love to her in the intervals.

"You've just got to marry me, Rose, now I'm a real soldier. Hang it all, I've been a faithful enough lover, haven't I? Six years now since I first succumbed to your fatal beauty that afternoon at Hurstcombe," he said entreatingly. "Do now, be a good little girl for once and marry your adoring Percy."

"Please don't go on about that," Rose replied, extricating her hand from his tenacious grasp, "We've always been good friends and always will be as far as I am concerned. Fact of the matter is, I *do* like you, and I *don't* love you."

"Well, never mind the love, just marry me. I'm off to the wars soon. You can't be so cruel as to let me go with a broken heart. If you just like me it will be quite enough."

“ All right, Percy,” said Rose, suddenly abandoning her principles. “ I suppose in war time things are different. I like you well enough not to wish to send you off to the front unhappy. You can tell mother I’ve consented.”

When the guests had gone and Rose went up to her room, she found herself amazed and horrified at what she had done.

What on earth was this war-time frenzy that made girls say “ Yes ” with their lips when their whole being was saying most unequivocally “ No ” ?

She had had not the remotest idea of ever marrying Percy, and yet, carried away by some inexplicable impulse, she had agreed to do so. To marry without love was awful, but how could she escape ? There was no escape. She had determined her own fate, and she must abide by it. It would be mean to try and back out of it now.

Percy called the next morning, radiantly happy. Mrs. Garstin had given her consent, and he was off to arrange about the licence.

Mrs. Garstin did not like the idea of the marriage and was astonished that Rose should in the end have yielded to Percy’s importunity. She questioned Rose about it, but found her quite unshaken in her determination.

They were married a month later and started off on their honeymoon—three days’ leave—to Brighton. Coming back to London on March 11th Percy found orders waiting for him and he was off to France on March 12th.

On March 20th the French and British forces commenced their advance on Cambrai, St. Quentin, and La Fère, and on March 24th Mrs. Percy Cole in the

Bayswater boarding-house received an intimation from the War Office that her husband had been killed. His aeroplane had been hit while over the German lines, he had made a gallant effort to bring it home, in which he almost succeeded, but it collapsed just after crossing the British line and fell in flames behind the reserve trenches.

Rose was appalled at the suddenness of the tragedy, and broke down in a paroxysm of grief. She realised now more than ever that she had never loved Percy, but that knowledge, instead of lessening the pain, only seemed to intensify it.

Poor, dear old Percy. With all his exuberant joy of living, he had had so little out of life. It seemed such hard luck to be cut off like this. But, after all, there were thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, of such cases in this cruel war, which sacrificed remorselessly the youngest, bravest and best of the nation's manhood.

It seemed so vile to have married him without love. But love cannot be compelled, and it was some consolation to think that the short honeymoon, which had not been a happy time for her, had been for him—in his own way of expressing it—a glimpse of Paradise. It was better and kinder to have given him that brief pleasure than to have stuck to her principles and sent him off disconsolate to the war.

Mr. Cole had been extremely annoyed at Percy's abrupt entry into matrimony, but having made inquiries and found that Miss Garstin was really a very respectable young person, he had come to think that his son had probably done the right thing, and a wife might help to steady him.

He was shocked and grieved at the news of Percy's

death, and took an early opportunity of calling in Bayswater to see his son's widow, with the object of making up to her for his previous neglect.

He spoke very kindly, assuring her of his intention to make ample provision for her needs. She was one of the family now, and he hoped that she would not hesitate to appeal to him in case of any difficulty.

His daughter Emily—Mrs. Polter—was keeping house for him as long as the war lasted, her husband having gone on service. She would call on Rose shortly and bring her down to Fir Grove for a change if that would suit her plans.

Rose thanked him very much, but said that now she was a widow she intended to go on with her nursing, and would probably be leaving England very shortly.

Mrs. Garstin spoke to Rose the same evening about her plans.

"I wish you'd give up this idea of nursing and stay at home to help me," she said pleadingly. "It's very hard work running this house single-handed, and I should miss you dreadfully."

"I'd really rather stay away with you, mother," answered Rose, "but I can't choose what I like best. They say I'm a very good nurse, and I cannot stay at home if I feel that I can do anything to help in this horrible war. So I have quite decided to go."

"But what about your marrying, and being a widow now, and all that sort of thing. Haven't they any regulations about that? Perhaps you're not eligible any longer?"

"I don't think that will matter a bit. But as I am registered as Rose Garstin and have not made any further notification, I remain Rose Garstin, I

suppose, on the books, and I have decided to stick to my maiden name. After being married to Percy for only a few days, it would be absurd to call myself 'Mrs. Cole.' I have not had time to get used to it, and I never shall."

"Well, I suppose you know your own business best, but if it comes to signing papers and so on, you'll have to sign 'Cole,' won't you?"

"Oh, I daresay. But I shan't bother about that till the time comes. Don't worry. There won't be any trouble. Even if I sign myself officially 'Cole' I never intend to use that name. You know I never really loved poor Percy, and now I just want to forget about the whole affair."

"You speak in a very heartless way."

"Not at all, mother. It's just the other way. I have too much heart to like being a fraud. I was a fraud when I married Percy, but, poor boy, he had been faithful for so long, and I allowed my pity for him to make me do a wrong thing."

Mrs. Garstin resigned herself to the inevitable, and made no further effort to interfere with Rose's plans.

Emily Polter came to London to see Rose and tried to persuade her to come down to Fir Grove for a few days, but without success.

On her return to Hurstcombe she told her father of Rose's refusal, and remarked what an extremely nice-looking girl she was.

"I can quite imagine Percy being charmed with her," she said; "but she did not appear to me to be at all the sort of person to be charmed with Percy."

"How can you speak so harshly of my dear boy," retorted her father warmly. "Whatever faults he

may have had, he has atoned for. One should not speak lightly of the dead."

"Oh, no, I never meant to do that at all," she replied. "Still Percy was, after all, just Percy. In saying that I do not mean any unkindness."

Emily found Hurstcombe very dull. She had the house to interest her and keep her from being idle, but outside that there was nothing.

Sir Clarence and Lady Campbell were alone at Highfields. Mary was still at her hospital in London, where she had established a reputation. Isabel was also in London and Peggy was nursing in France.

Aubrey was in France with his regiment. He wrote once a week, but very briefly, excusing himself on the grounds that the censor made such a fuss if one said anything about anything. He was well and "full of beans," and he had been twice in action, and so far had escaped without wounds.

They read in the papers of the capture of the German trenches at St. Eloi on March 27th, and knew that his regiment had taken part in it. They were naturally anxious, but were relieved to get a few lines from him telling, without any details, what a glorious affair it was, and how proud he was to have been in the show.

A week later they heard of further successes in which Aubrey's regiment had taken part, but on April 8th they were distressed to see in the papers that the Germans had retaken the trenches at St. Eloi on the previous day, and this was followed by a notification from the War Office that Lieutenant A. M. Campbell had been wounded, not severely, was in hospital, and doing well.

After a three weeks' spell in hospital Aubrey came

home on short leave, arriving at Highfields with his left arm in a sling and looking a little pulled down as a result of his wound.

Mrs. Mandersfield and Beatrice came over the day after his arrival to see him and hear all about his adventures.

Beatrice's eyes glistened as he described the details of the fighting. What a hero he was, and how doubly handsome he looked with his arm in a sling, and with his general air of convalescence adding a touch of refinement to his features. She supposed he would get a D.S.O. or some similar honour. Perhaps, later, a V.C.

Aubrey laughed at the suggestion.

"If they handed out D.S.O.s to everyone who was wounded, they'd have to stop making ammunition to manufacture enough orders to keep pace with the demand." He added, modestly, "There's nothing heroic, you know, in being wounded. One doesn't get wounded on purpose."

"No, but one must be very brave to put oneself in a position of getting wounded."

"That's wrong, too. Because one doesn't put oneself in that position. One is put there by others. Someone says, 'Advance,' and you've got to advance."

"Yes, I see that, of course. But, after all, it was your voluntary action in joining up that brought all that about."

"Quite right. But even that action is not really voluntary. One is constrained by so many things that it becomes compulsory. You'd have to be braver not to join up than to join up. Besides, if we accept your view, Beatrice," he said, laughing, "we'd all get D.S.O.s the day we enlisted."

Sir Clarence interrupted : " You talk quite like a philosopher, Aubrey. It is extraordinary how a short spell of war seems to alter a man's whole psychology."

" Yes, I daresay it does," he replied. " It certainly does make one think. And in the trenches there are long periods when one has literally nothing else to do but think."

Beatrice's love had reached the point of adoration. She was a good deal with Aubrey and seemed absolutely fascinated with his good looks and his valiant doings on the field of battle.

As regards the latter Aubrey could never be guilty of bad form, and he told his tales reluctantly and with genuine modesty. But Beatrice insisted on hearing more and more. She wanted every detail, so that she might try to picture the conditions in her mind.

Aubrey spoke a good deal, too, of love.

" I always think of you, Beatrice, but you must forgive me if I don't write very much," he said in reply to her complaint that his letters were few and far between. " I love you very much indeed, and I hope you won't go falling in love with any other fellow while I'm away."

" What a dreadful suggestion. You know I could never think of anyone else. And there is no one to think of if I wanted to."

" Sounds as if you were only true to me because there was no choice."

" Silly Aubrey. You know that if there were a million to choose from, it would always be you."

Beatrice turned the conversation back to the war, but Aubrey asked her to let him forget for a day or

two. He just wanted to enjoy himself for these few days and put the war quite out of his mind.

He left Highfields early in May to spend three days in London before returning to the front.

Mrs. Mandersfield hoped that he would have spoken to her about Beatrice, but he had said nothing definite. Young men in these days don't bother much about parents. Very likely he had said all there was to say to Beatrice. But Beatrice had confided nothing to her, so she took the first opportunity when talking with her, of guiding the conversation tactfully to a point where she could broach the subject.

"What a fine fellow he is," she said, as they sat in the drawing-room after dinner. "I always knew he would do well. You never tell me much of your private thoughts, darling, but you might tell me how things stand exactly between you and him."

"How do you mean, mother ?"

"I mean that you and he apparently love each other very much, isn't that so ?"

"Oh, we've always loved each other for as long as I remember."

"Yes, yes. That's a matter of common knowledge. But surely, Beatrice, you must understand that I mean more than that. As you won't tell me of your own accord, I want to know whether he has proposed to you or not ?"

"Proposed ? What an ugly word. No, certainly not. Why on earth should he propose ?"

"Well, mothers must take a practical outlook in these matters. If he loves you, he must want to marry you, and if he wants to marry you, he must propose."

“ If that’s what you’re after, mother, you needn’t worry. I suppose he has proposed in a sort of way. He says we love each other and must always belong to each other.”

“ Yes, that is a sort of proposal. The unpleasant, slipshod way of you young people. But one can’t announce an engagement on that, and that is what I want to do.”

“ Heavens, mother. Why on earth ? If we belong to each other we’ll be married some day and everything will be done in due form. I just love Aubrey, and have never considered the prosaic question of marriage. Perhaps some day he’ll rush round and carry me off to a registry office.”

“ Marriage is not prosaic, my dear. And people are married in churches, not in registry offices.”

“ Personally, I dislike the church service very much, and hope that if ever I marry I shall not be asked to go through it.”

Mrs. Mandersfield was too horrified to go into the subject at the present moment, when Beatrice was in one of her rebellious moods. But she made a note of the necessity of renewing the topic on a more favourable occasion. She would ask Mrs. Carford also to speak to her about it.

She was just going to write to Sinclair, and she wanted to be able to tell him that Beatrice was definitely engaged. Being unable to do this she contented herself by mentioning Aubrey’s visit to the village and hinting that she would probably have more to tell him shortly concerning him and Beatrice.

Sinclair was in Egypt. He was a good correspondent, writing a long letter once a week telling his mother as much as the censor would allow him to.

He complained that cavalry were having such a poor chance in this war. Still he was glad he had gone into the cavalry, and he felt sure their chance would come. Meantime he was out of everything almost. He had taken part in a few scraps round the Canal against the Turks, but beyond that, there was nothing doing.

Beatrice was outwardly as keen as ever about her work at the Vicarage, but she groaned in heart at the dullness of her existence. It was hard to be the only one left while all the others were off to seek adventure.

She was therefore delighted to get a letter from Gwendoline in Kashmir, asking her to come out and stay for a time. She would not necessarily be just loafing. If she wanted war work it would be easier to get it in India than at home.

"I do wish you could manage it, Beatrice," Gwendoline wrote in the last sentence of her letter. "It's miserable for me alone, with Dick always away at his work. And he wants to join up, and then I should be absolutely alone; it would be awful. This is a beautiful country, and you'd love it. All my sisters are busy, as you know, and can't possibly come. Even if they could, I'd sooner have you."

She also wrote to Mrs. Mandersfield begging her to spare Beatrice, but Beatrice ruefully agreed with her mother that it couldn't be done.

"I'd love to come, Gwen, if I possibly could," she wrote. "Goodness knows it's dull enough here. But I simply cannot leave mother alone, can I?"

It was hard luck, but it couldn't be helped. War work at the Vicarage seemed to be all that Fate held for Beatrice.

CHAPTER XIV

THE Territorial battalion to which John had been appointed, arrived in India at the end of 1915. Officers and men were bitterly disappointed at being sent to India, which they regarded as a backwater. However, in war time, one has to take things as they come.

The military authorities did their best to soothe them. On their arrival at Karachi they were inspected by the G.O.C., who congratulated Lieut. Colonel Andrews on the fine body of men under his command. In addressing the battalion on parade he said : " I am sure that all ranks feel a sense of disappointment at not being called on to take part in the more active theatre of the war, in France. We would all be there if we could. But in a great Empire such as ours men must stand to arms in every quarter of the globe, and those who are not engaged in active fighting must console themselves with the reflection that they are doing as much to win the war as the more fortunate ones in the trenches."

After the parade was dismissed, officers and men talked it over and agreed that the General had spoken very nicely. There was something in what he said, though it might be a very poor consolation.

A few days later, in rest camp at Lahore, they were again inspected, and the General made a few remarks on parade. He said that they were a fine body of men. It was bad luck their not being in

France, but they were really doing as much in the war as if they were in the trenches.

Their final destination was Peshawar, where they were inspected by the G.O.C. Brigade who, after telling them that they were a fine body of men, went on to say that they must not be disappointed at being in India instead of France, because they were helping to win the war just as much as anybody else.

Two days later they were inspected by the G.O.C. Division, who remarked that they were a very fine body of men. They would, of course, have liked to be in France. But even here they were answering their country's call to as great an extent as those more fortunate ones who met the Germans face to face.

They were inspected later by the Army Commander and the Commander-in-Chief, each of whom made the same original remarks.

By this time they were beginning to feel that it was being well rubbed into them.

John Cole had got the whole speech off by heart and was frequently called on in the mess to give a few "inspection remarks." Colonel Andrews, however, having been congratulated so often by John on commanding a "fine body of men," began to weary of the joke, and forbade further performances as being contrary to the spirit of discipline.

The only real consolation they had was that, being in Peshawar, they were not likely to be quite out of it. The frontier tribes were giving a good deal of trouble, and if there was anything doing, the Peshawar Brigade would be certain to be in it.

They had not long to wait.

In March the Mohmand tribes, who had been showing an inclination for war during the past year,

attacked Shabkadr Fort within two marches of Peshawar, and the Brigade was ordered to move at once to deal with the situation.

Peshawar, where John's regiment had now been stationed for three months, is the capital of the North-West Frontier Province of India, which comprises, roughly, the country between the right bank of the Indus and the Afghan Frontier.

Colonel Andrews was very keen on getting his officers to study local conditions—obviously the first duty of a soldier, but one often neglected. He invited an experienced officer of the old Frontier Force to give a series of lectures to the battalion, and succeeded in getting them to take a real interest in the subject. John Cole found the Pathans fascinating people, and having engaged a Peshawari as personal servant even went so far as to learn a few sentences in their language—Pushtoo.

He wrote long letters to his father telling him of all their doings and retailing the information he had acquired.

The North-West Frontier of India has been a famous fighting ground since we came in touch with it over sixty years ago, and he found the history of the many small wars and expeditions most exciting reading.

The actual line of the frontier runs at the foot of the barren hills of the Suleiman range, and the Afghan Frontier follows the line of the same hills on the Afghan side.

The range of mountains that thus forms a sort of buffer between India and Afghanistan is independent territory inhabited by various tribes of Pathans—fanatical Mahomedans—whose only profession is that

of highway robber and freebooter. Running roughly through the centre of this independent territory is the "Durand line," a further line of demarcation dividing the tribes into those on our side supposed to be more or less under our influence, and those on the Afghan side under the purely nominal influence of Afghanistan.

Captain Hutchinson, of the 3rd Punjabis, who was the officer invited to enlighten the regiment, gave them an idea of the situation from the tribesman's point of view.

It was worth their while to get this well into their heads, because one needed to know something of the psychology of the enemy, and the enemy in this case were actuated by motives quite unlike those to be encountered in any other sphere of action in the great war. In some cases one half of a tribe were subjects of the King, and the other half were independent. And in all cases the friend of to-day might be the enemy of to-morrow—a man might be fighting on either side within the space of a week.

All the tribes who live in independent territory are spoken of as Pathans. They enlist freely in our army, partly out of a genuine love for soldiering, and partly to gain instruction in musketry, so that they may be able to make the best use of their rifles in the pursuit of their own blood-feuds, or in raids on our territory. In expeditions on the frontier it is satisfactory to know that the good shooting of the enemy is a practical tribute to the efficiency of our training, half of the men on the enemy's side being time-expired soldiers from our own regiments.

There is nothing mean or treacherous in this behaviour. As long as he serves with us the Pathan

is as loyal as anybody else and does not hesitate to fight against his own people. When his time is up he goes back to his tribe and, naturally enough, considers himself free to join up with them when there is anything doing. When the tribes are at peace with us they keep themselves in training by fighting each other, and when they are at peace with each other, the individual Pathan keeps his hand in by carrying on blood-feuds with one or more of his neighbours. No self-respecting Pathan is ever without a blood-feud. So, on the whole, they are kept pretty busy from year's end to year's end.

The country round Peshawar is a fertile plain watered by irrigation canals from the Swat and Kabul rivers, the cultivated area running up to the base of the foothills, whose barren and rugged outlines form a striking contrast with the emerald-green of the wheat, sugar-cane, or Indian corn crops immediately below them.

Once inside the hills all verdure practically ceases, except in the beds of the infrequent mountain streams.

It is easy to say that highway robbery is wicked—so it is. But even while continuing to hold that view, the most virtuous person in the world would undoubtedly become a highway robber himself under similar circumstances.

Imagine the spirited Pathan looking down from his barren crags, that do not afford even sufficient sustenance for a few goats, on to the rich and smiling plains below, where groups of mulberry and shisham trees indicate the presence of snug villages, the dwelling-place of well-to-do peasants. And one can imagine further his mind dwelling on the thought

that in each village lives a fat and wealthy Hindu money-lender, whom he might manage to capture in a timely raid, and hold to ransom.

There is a sporting outlook in the Pathan's character that appeals to the sport-loving Britisher.

Peshawar city and cantonments lie about ten miles away from the mouth of the famous Khyber Pass, that great main road from Central Asia to India through which successive hordes of invaders have poured since the days of Alexander the Great, and for thousands of years before his time.

The mouth of the Pass is guarded by Jamrud Fort, situated exactly at the spot where traders or invaders debouch from the defile. It is one of a series of forts of varying size which run all along the frontier line. Michni, Shabkadr, and Abazai forts hold the line through the Mohmand country where the troops were now engaged.

The Brigade marched to Shabkadr without incident, and the tribesmen withdrew to the hills after a few skirmishes. Spies reported that the religious leaders were preaching a Jihad, or Holy War, which would mean a big gathering of the Mohmands, and possibly a serious affair in the next few days.

The troops went into camp at Subhan Khwar, two miles to the west of Shabkadr Fort, and about two miles from the low foothills to the north which were held by the enemy. The right flank of the entrenched camp ran along the edge of the dry water-course which serves as a main exit from the Mohmand country.

The enemy showed considerable signs of activity, but the General had no intention of ordering anything in the nature of a serious attack at the present

moment. To attack and pursue the enemy into the hills would be merely to start on a wild-geese chase. A few casualties would be inflicted in the advance, and the Brigade would suffer ten times as many casualties in its retirement. In warfare of this sort one is delighted to find how easy a victorious advance is. Position after position is captured with few casualties, and the enemy flees before the victorious invader. But one can't advance for ever, and as soon as the troops begin to withdraw affairs take on a very different complexion.

During the advance one has never been aware of more than a score or so of the enemy at any one point. The moment the retirement begins, however, there are as many rifles firing on the withdrawing troops as there are rocks in a country that is nothing but rocks.

So the affair begins with a sort of sparring, the enemy giving a good many tempting openings to persuade our troops to enter the hills, while the attacking troops give him as many favourable opportunities in the hopes of luring him out on to the open ground.

Three days were spent in these preliminary encounters, without many casualties on either side, while the enemy kept the Brigade lively at night by firing into camp, and shouting out in the darkness disrespectful remarks concerning the British Government, the General, and the troops under his command.

On the fourth day things seemed ripe for an attack. It was too much to hope that the Mohmands would be lured out actually on to the plain ; they knew the rules of the game as well as we did.

But several thousands of them had gathered on the nearest of the foothills, waving their war flags, and building stone parapets that suggested an intention of bringing off an action that might result in something like a pitched battle. Orders for the attack on the following morning were accordingly issued that night, and Colonel Andrews was delighted to think that India wasn't such a backwater after all, and if he and his men were to be denied the honour of serving in France they would at least be able to feel that they were not altogether non-combatants.

His men were keen and well-trained, but their training had until recently been on the lines of European warfare, and frontier fighting was something of a special nature.

Still, thanks to Captain Hutchinson's help in instruction, they had a pretty good idea of what lay before them, and the main principles of tactics do not alter.

The attack commenced at daybreak with the infantry advancing over the stony plain towards the enemy's position. The Mohmands seemed determined to put up a really stubborn fight, and if they held to that resolution, to-day's action might be a decisive one. Moving over the open ground the troops soon began to suffer casualties, but the enemy's fire was to a great extent kept down by the guns of the mountain battery that accompanied the Brigade. Artillery fire could really have settled the action as far as putting the enemy to flight went, but he who fights and runs away will live to fight another day, and a victory of that nature would be a farce. To make anything out of it, it must be an infantry action. For this reason the fire of the guns

was withheld, only a sufficient intensity being maintained to enable the infantry to cross the open without being too severely handled.

John Cole's platoon was on the extreme right of the line, and this position brought them into a very tricky piece of ground. The squadron of cavalry on the right was watching the nullah, but this still remained a point of danger for the infantry. The platoon found itself involved in a most difficult line of advance. It was necessary to lap over into the nullah and this made the exercise of command very difficult, with half the men on the higher ground, and half on the lower. Every twenty yards they had to cross small subsidiary nullahs, which had to be carefully examined, any one of them being capable of concealing a large number of the enemy.

To add to the difficulty there was the necessity of keeping in line with the whole movement on the left.

By eleven o'clock the infantry were already holding the lower slopes of the foothills. The artillery fire on the enemy's stone breastworks was intensified for a few minutes, and on its cessation the infantry charged with the bayonet and captured the position, the enemy retreating in haste without waiting for cold steel.

The troops swept over the position and followed up the tribesmen, inflicting severe casualties.

By one o'clock there were no signs of the enemy, and a general retirement was ordered.

The moment the withdrawal commenced fire broke out in the most astonishing way from behind rocks and boulders, so close to the troops that the

men could have sworn they had searched those very rocks a few minutes before and there was no trace of a human being.

Colonel Andrews' battalion was now to learn the difficulties of retirement. Casualties increased rapidly, and there was some confusion. It is not easy even for the best-trained troops to keep as steady as they should in these difficult moments. The whole morale alters in a retirement, even though the men know themselves to have gained a victory. The man stepping back is never the same person as the man stepping forward.

At two points of the line gallant charges were made by the enemy's swordsmen—Ghazis, religious fanatics glad to die in killing an infidel.

John's platoon on the right suffered severely. Killed or wounded men had to be brought along, and each man knocked over necessitated the withdrawal of two more from the firing line, to get him away.

The enemy were particularly busy on the flank, and would have completely encircled the platoon if it had not been for cavalry action, which saved the situation time after time when it seemed hopeless.

About two o'clock, immediately after a hard-pressed withdrawal from a slight fold in the ground to one about forty yards in rear, Sergeant Walker reported to John that Lance-Corporal Ashburton was missing. He had been seen at the last halt, but not since. He must have been knocked over as they rose to double to the new position.

"Well, we can't leave him there," said John. "Ask one of the men to volunteer with me and we'll go back and get him."

"Right, sir," responded the sergeant with a salute. "Orders is orders, I know. But the whole line is retiring and this platoon is getting left. I'm sorry for poor Ashburton, sir, but I think if you delay you'll risk the whole platoon."

"Damn it all, sergeant, I don't mind your giving your opinion. But I'm going after Ashburton. You can handle the platoon all right, I know. Hang on as long as you can and cover us by your fire. If we don't come back, carry on as you think best."

Private Lucas offered to go with John, and the two rushed forward, disappearing from sight as they dropped into cover about forty yards ahead.

At this point the platoon found themselves fiercely attacked by a body of the enemy who had concealed themselves in one of the small nullahs on the further bank of the main nullah.

The Ghazis charged, sword in hand, covered by rifle fire from another party lying in concealment a little further away.

It was a very critical moment. The platoon was on the verge of being rolled up, and with them would go the whole of the right of the line. But the ever-watchful commander of the squadron on the right spotted the disturbance, got his men on to the sandy bed of the nullah, and put the enemy to flight with a brilliant charge.

The withdrawal continued, and there was no sign of the three brave men left behind.

By three o'clock the enemy had ceased to press the retirement. The troops were on the open ground now, and the cavalry were longing for an opportunity. The tribesmen noted the intention of the cavalry

commander, and decided not to give him the opportunity.

Sergeant Walker had reported the losses of the platoon to Captain Morris, commanding the company, and he passed on the information to headquarters.

On arrival in camp, the Adjutant collected reports, and Lieutenant John Cole, Lance-Corporal Ashburton, and Private Lucas were among those reported missing.

CHAPTER XV

AS John and Lucas topped the low ridge behind which Ashburton had last been seen they were confronted by two Mohmands, who were stooping over the lance-corporal's body. The Mohmands charged, sword in hand. Lucas met one with his bayonet, driving it home into the man's body, but receiving a sword cut with all the dying man's concentrated energy and hatred, that almost split his head in two. The two men fell dead side by side. John, using his revolver, fired two shots into his adversary's body before he could make good his charge. The Mohmand dropped dead at his feet. As he rushed forward towards Ashburton, however, he received a bullet in his right leg from some distant marksman, which brought him to the ground alongside of the lance-corporal.

Poor Ashburton was unmistakably dead. He had a sword cut right across his face, and blood was oozing from two places near his heart. He had probably been wounded in the first instance, and the two tribesmen had put in the finishing touches before proceeding to rifle his pockets, just as John and Lucas had come on the scene.

John lay on the ground wondering what he had better do next. It didn't seem that there was anything to do. Any movement beyond a slow crawl was impossible, and even if he could move there was nowhere to move to. To crawl out of the cover he

was in would mean certain death. To remain where he was must in the end mean certain death.

The retirement must continue. Only a forward movement of a large portion of the line could possibly do anything to help the situation, and this was out of the question.

He heard sounds of firing, and the defiant yells of the tribesmen as they swept on to the right and left of his place of concealment. Soon a party of them would pass over this spot, and then all would be up. Well, let it be so. Those brave fellows, Ashburton and Lucas, were dead, and what more right had he to live than they ? He still had his revolver and ammunition, and unless he was despatched outright by a rifle bullet he could give a good account of himself.

As his gaze wandered round the small depression in which he lay, he noticed an overhanging shelf of rock at the point where the hollow broke into a small nullah. If he could drag himself as far as that there might be just a chance of concealment. It was worth trying, anyway.

Slowly and painfully he crawled towards the rock and at last succeeded in squeezing himself well into its protection. He was just visible to anyone facing him from the north, but concealed from the three other points of the compass. He took out his revolver, reloaded it, and waited. He looked at his watch and saw that it was half-past three. The troops would be nearly back in camp now.

As he lay there reflecting, three Mohmands appeared with a shout, bounding over the ground towards the four bodies that lay at the bottom of the hollow. He might easily be seen by them as they entered from the north side, and he fingered his

revolver anxiously, wondering whether to open fire first or wait till he was discovered. But they were too intent on securing the booty from the dead bodies before them to think of looking round first before proceeding to their task.

They squabbled among themselves over the contents of the dead men's pockets, robbing the corpses of their own comrades with as little compunction as they robbed the white men.

Two of them soon made off, but the third remained behind for purposes of his own.

John wondered what the man was about, as he drew his long, glittering dagger from its sheath. In a few moments he realised with horror that this brute was intent on mutilating the dead bodies of the two white men. Without a moment's hesitation he took a steady aim with his revolver, and fired. The man was not more than ten yards away and the aim was true. The Mohmand dropped dead across the other corpses.

Now the other two would have heard the sound of the shot, and would return to see after their comrade and all would be up. It didn't matter much. He would sooner give his life than be haunted all his remaining days by the thought that he had looked on at such devilish deeds, and lain low to save his own skin.

But the other two did not return.

Just as dusk came on another party of six men passed over the ground. They only stopped to make sure that the bodies had been stripped of everything valuable. The body of the last comer was the only one that interested them ; they took his rifle and ammunition and his sheepskin coat, and then moved off again towards the hills.

Night came on, and John felt cold and stiff. His leg hurt him intensely, but didn't seem to be bleeding much. He wouldn't bleed to death, at any rate. The first pain of the wound had only been like a sharp sting. Now it had turned into a dull ache—something like toothache. He was weak from loss of blood, but his weakness did not prevent him from feeling miserably hungry and thirsty.

There is a limit to pain, and sleep came at last, in spite of the cold and discomfort. But soon after midnight he woke up to find some animal—probably a jackal—prowling round. It was rather weird and beastly. What was going to happen to-morrow ? There seemed to be no prospect but eventual discovery by the enemy and a painful death. He couldn't go to sleep again.

Now his mind was filled with thoughts of Beatrice. Dear, darling, scornful Beatrice.

How he loved her. And what joy his love brought into his life. Why should it ? It should be misery to love, and find no responding love. Within a few hours he would be dead, and would carry his sterile love with him to another world. He wondered what lay on the other side of the grave. His Christian belief was firm and unshaken. He knew that he would rise again, in some indefinable sense—that his soul was immortal. That he would be judged for his actions in this world, the use or misuse he had made of his talents. And he knew that God was a God of Mercy. The representation of Paradise in the Scriptures was metaphorical. It indicated some higher, happier state in which the soul might make infinite progress. But the reflections of a finite mind on infinite things were futile. On the whole,

perhaps his Christian belief was unorthodox. But there was another puzzle. Where was one to find orthodoxy ? Only in the Roman Catholic Church. But that was an orthodoxy that demanded something of his faith which it had not got. Blind, unreasoning acceptance of so many things that seemed unessential, obscuring the one single essential fact.

Then his thoughts reverted to Beatrice and he warmed himself with his love for her.

Towards dawn he fell into a deep sleep from which he was aroused by the sound of voices raised in altercation.

The Mohmands were getting busy again, scouring the battlefield like vultures for any little piece of loot that might have escaped observation last night.

Three of them had entered the hollow, and were quarrelling over two clips of ammunition that they had found beneath Ashburton's dead body.

As they wrangled together one of them turning round looked straight into John's eyes.

He knew that his last moment had come. He was quite defenceless. During the night his revolver had slipped from his grasp and now lay just beyond his reach. He ought to have put it back in the holster, but he had been too weak to bother about it, and might have been too weak to get it out again if suddenly required.

The Mohmand raised his rifle and fired. John felt a pain like the searing of a red hot iron and knew no more.

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Colonel Andrews was much distressed at having to report three missing, and Sergeant Walker felt that there was an unjust accusation of cowardice hanging over him.

The General decided that nothing could be done at the late hour when the report was received, but the cavalry would be out at the first streak of light, and if the enemy were not in force would examine all the ground in the low foothills near the right bank of the main nullah. The bodies would probably be recovered.

In accordance with these orders Major Williams led his squadron out on the following morning, reaching the foot of the hills just as day broke. There were no signs of the enemy so far, and the patrols pushed on to the higher ground.

Lieut. Gordon with his patrol sighted a few Mohmands prowling about in the distance, and pushing on rapidly, killed one and put the rest to flight.

He spoke to Duffadar Indar Singh :

"We must be near the spot where those fellows were killed yesterday, but this is difficult ground to search thoroughly."

"Yes, sahib," responded the duffadar, "it is difficult but we'll find them all right."

Suddenly a shot rang out. No one was visible, but the sound seemed to come from very close. Possibly just beyond that next rise.

Gordon with the duffadar and two sowars put spurs to their horses and charged over the stony ground. In a minute they were in the hollow where John lay, and a minute later three dead Mohmands were added to the gruesome pile of corpses.

The tribesmen, taken entirely by surprise, had fired wildly and turned to flee, but there was no escape for them.

One sowar and one horse were slightly wounded.

The party dismounted, sending back a report to the squadron commander.

Major Williams was soon on the spot, the bodies of Lucas and Ashburton were identified, and the G.O.C. informed by signal message.

A careless patrol might now have moved off to look further for the third body—such things have happened before now. But Major Williams' squadron had been well trained.

John had tucked himself away so securely into his nook that unless one made a careful examination of the whole site, or happened to be looking from the north side, his body would not be seen.

But before advancing further, the ground was very thoroughly searched, and the third missing man speedily discovered lying in the shelter of the rock with blood streaming from his face.

"Good God!" cried the Major. "Poor devil. He must have been alive all night and these swine have just finished him off. Cruel luck we came just one minute too late. Have a look at him, Gordon; you're a good hand at first aid, though this poor fellow looks a good deal beyond that."

Gordon was already kneeling beside the body and opening his tunic when John slowly opened his eyes.

"He's alive, Major," shouted Gordon. "Hand me your flask and I'll give him a drop of brandy."

The Major handed over his flask, and told the duffadar to call up the ambulance, sending a message to camp that the third man had been found alive.

Twenty-four hours later John found himself in the officers' ward of the Station Hospital in Peshawar.

After that night of agony it was indescribable

bliss to find himself lying in a nice clean bed with beautiful white linen, attended on by skilled doctors and angelic nurses.

That last shot, that ought to have blown out his brains, had been quite a harmless wound, the bullet passing through his cheek making a clean hole without even touching his teeth and jawbone. It would not have knocked him out if it had not been for his weak state and previous loss of blood.

His leg was painful, the bone being broken halfway between knee and ankle. If it had been seen to at once it would have been a simple affair ; as it was, the surgeons were not quite certain how it would go. It might be necessary to amputate but they were hopeful of saving the leg.

Being naturally strong and healthy, his wound progressed favourably, and at the end of a fortnight he was able to sit up in bed and write a few lines.

He wrote to his father, to Emily, and to Mrs. Carford, telling them of the recent incidents and adding that he was now on the mend and hoped soon to be back with the regiment.

Then he thought he'd write to Beatrice. An unheard of thing to do, but he couldn't see that it was wrong. It might be against all rules but he was convinced that it was very right.

He longed to write a simple letter of love. But such an idea was foolish, farcical.

Still he must somehow bring her mind in touch with his. It was nearly a year since he had declared his love for her, and he wondered how it had been possible for him to live so long without the sound of her voice or sight of her sweet face.

It was a difficult letter to write. His pen kept

running away with him. It wanted to write nothing but "I love you, love you." Several efforts had to be torn up. At last it was written and despatched.

On a beautiful morning in May, Mrs. Mandersfield and Beatrice sat at breakfast at Upton Green.

Mrs. Mandersfield sorted out the letters that lay by her plate, handing three to Beatrice with the remark : "I see there's one from India. Gwendoline, I expect. If she asks you again, I might possibly let you go. Lady Campbell was speaking about it the other day, and suggested I should shut up the house here and go to live with them. It is very kind of her, as it is only by some arrangement of that sort that I could possibly let you go."

"Thanks, mother," replied Beatrice busying herself with opening her letters, "I would like to go awfully if you can spare me."

She opened the envelope of the Indian letter carelessly, and her eye fell immediately on the bold signature, "John Cole." She put her letter down with a bang, knocking a spoon on to the floor as she did so.

Mrs. Mandersfield looked up. "What's the matter ?" she said anxiously. "No bad news I hope ?"

"Nothing whatever," replied Beatrice firmly and untruthfully. "It was just my clumsiness."

She continued eating her breakfast calmly, without touching her letters again, but her feelings were far from calm.

How dare he write to her ? What vulgar impertinence. If there had been a fire in the room she would have thrown the letter in without reading it. As it was, the wastepaper basket would receive it immediately they rose from the table.

After breakfast she took the letter and tore it in half, and then some evil spirit or good angel took possession of her, and made her desist.

Perhaps it would be unfair not to read it. John Cole could not honestly be blamed for just falling in love with her, and this was probably an apology.

So she read the letter.

An hour later she found her mother seated at her writing-table. She put the torn letter before her saying : " I think you ought to read this, mother," and adding as she left the room ; " I'll be back in a minute."

Mrs. Mandersfield took up the letter, adjusted her glasses, and turned with languid interest to the signature. Reading the name the signs of languor speedily gave way to an expression of anger. This is what she read :

Peshawar,
India.
April 10, 1916.

Dear Miss Mandersfield,

I hope you will forgive my writing to you, but I cannot resist the desire to do so.

Since I have been in India I have had many opportunities for quiet thought. My mind constantly recurs to the occasion when we last met—nearly a year ago—and I feel that it is my duty to write to you, and I really think it is your duty to read this letter through. Please do not give way to the impulse I know you will feel to tear it up unread.

What I want to say to you is this. When I told you that I loved you, I was obeying some influence outside myself. I have really loved you since I first saw you, with all the intensity that the human heart is capable

of. *But I had no intention whatever of declaring this love to you. Not because it was 'hopeless,' for with everything against me, I should never lose hope. But because, under the circumstances, it might seem impertinent to you.*

I know you resented it in that way because I remember you accused me of taking an unfair advantage of you, meeting you in that way by chance. Thank God for that chance !

We may never meet again, and if we do, you may never return my love, but I want you to know and feel that that love—an honourable love for which I have no reason to be ashamed—is yours for ever, come what may.

I write all this because it seemed to me that you, realising that the declaration of my love was just a sudden impulse, might possibly have thought that the love itself was no more than impulse.

That is not at all the case. My love for you is unchanging and unquenchable.

I have tried to write this letter as calmly as possible, just to make you sure of the facts only. My pen longs to write protestations of love but I have done my best to restrain it.

You need not fear that I shall ever trouble you again with letters.

If you have read so far, please use your judgment as to whether you should show this letter to your mother or to your godfather.

I know you will forgive me for writing, and I hope you will try not to feel too unkindly towards me. My only offence is my unalterable love.

Yours always most sincerely,

John Cole.

As Beatrice re-entered the room Mrs. Mandersfield threw the letter down with the remark :

“What a piece of insolence. And what does this mean, Beatrice, about the occasion when you last met ?”

Beatrice narrated the whole incident to her mother.

“How could you conceal such a thing from me, Beatrice ? I never for one moment thought you could be so deceitful.”

“You were quite right. I cannot be deceitful ; it’s simply not in my nature. This was not deceit. Perhaps you might call it tact. I didn’t want to worry you, and I never imagined that the incident would crop up again in this way. In any case I felt that telling you would be mean in the same sort of way as telling tales at school.”

“Really, Beatrice, I’m ashamed of you. In love with and going to marry Aubrey, and then allowing this awful man they call ‘The Bounder,’ of all people in the world, to make love to you.”

“But I never allowed him, mother, and he did not make love to me at all. He simply burst out with a frantic declaration of love before I realised what he was about.”

“Well, one can’t wonder at his nickname. I suppose one can’t expect much else from people of no breeding.”

Beatrice had some difficulty in repressing a desire to argue with her mother. She was amused to think that she had been on the point of defending John’s character. It really was rather rot to talk of him like that. Putting all prejudice aside he was the exact reverse of a bounder. He had no business to declare his love to her in the way he had, but somehow or

other she felt there was something rather attractive about his fierceness. And he had no business to write to her at all. But she thought she could sympathise with the feelings that led him to write, and he had written very nicely. She liked his letter. It seemed to her manly, honest, and straight-forward.

Mrs. Mandersfield wanted her to show the letter to her godfather.

"I really think Tom ought to know about this, dear, and I think he would be able to give you good advice. It is quite likely that this young man will pester you with love-letters, and I believe in such cases one has to speak to the police about it."

"I don't expect we shall need to do that," replied Beatrice, repressing a smile at the idea of putting the matter before the village constable, "But I think I should like to show the letter to Major Robertson."

Major Robertson was away in London and only returned to Hurstcombe ten days later.

The day after his arrival Beatrice walked over to Bothwell after lunch and showed him the letter.

He read it through twice, running his fingers through his hair and displaying other signs of surprise and agitation.

When he had finished he turned to his goddaughter.

"Now, Beatrice, I've read the letter," he said in serious tones, "I've nothing to say about it till you make a full confession."

Beatrice told him of the original incident with the same explanations as she had given her mother.

"Of course," she concluded, "I never really thought he'd be such a cad as to catch me unawares like that."

"I wonder. Is he a cad? Was it a caddish thing to do? Honestly, I must say, I rather admire

him for it. Hang it all, Beatrice, I'd have loved to have done it myself."

"Surely you're not going to defend him ? "

"I am. There's nothing I'm more certain about. Just listen to me. I know John Cole fairly well and I admire him tremendously. The people in the village simply adore him, and their opinion counts for a good deal. A malicious fate seems to have pursued him since he came to Hurstcombe. He has been christened 'The Bounder,' when he is a first-rate good fellow. Accused of being in a drunken brawl when he was fighting a bully twice his size to save old Mrs. Biddlecombe's dog. And finally called a conscientious objector when his heart and soul were in the war. To add to his rotten luck he ends by falling in love with a girl socially above him who does not care twopence for him and never will. Then he has the pluck to tell her of his great love before he goes off to the war. He's a fine fellow, and if I had a son I'd be proud if he were half as good a man."

"Really, you seem quite enthusiastic about him. I rather expected you to take a different tone about it. You forget I'm practically engaged to Aubrey and that made his behaviour even worse."

"Nonsense. How could he know anything about the state of affairs between you and Aubrey ? "

"Well, perhaps he couldn't. Still, don't you think it was rather mean to write me a letter like that, sort of trying to revive a forgotten episode ? "

"No, it wasn't mean. It was noble. That letter was written in hospital after hours of anguish, and it was the very restrained outpouring of a chivalrous spirit."

"You seem to know a lot about it. He says nothing about being in hospital."

"No, he wouldn't. But, as a matter of fact, I do know all about it. I had a letter by this mail from my old friend Colonel Cranleigh who is commanding a Bengal lancer regiment on the frontier in India. He told me about the recent fighting near Shabkadr and dwelt particularly on the performance of a Lieutenant John Cole of the Territorials, who, he said, ought to get a V.C. Wait a moment and I'll get the letter and read you what he says."

He left the room, returning shortly and reading to her the description of the fight and the rescue of John Cole the day after.

As he finished reading he commented :

"And that's the man who has been called a bounder, and a conscientious objector, and whom you now christen a cad."

Without waiting for Beatrice's reply he went on :

"As regards the letter, if you will allow me, I will write to him in my capacity of godfather and guardian, and say that you thank him for the letter, and honour him for the sentiments it contains, but you would be glad if the subject were dropped. It's cruel hard luck on him, and a pity that he never knew you were in love with Aubrey, and practically engaged to him. Perhaps I might add a line about that."

"Thank you very much," replied Beatrice rather meekly. "But I don't think there is any need to bring Aubrey into it."

A month later John got Major Robertson's letter and wrote thanking him for it. There was little in the letter beyond what Beatrice had agreed should be put in it, and a few kindly words of congratulation on his exploits.

CHAPTER XVI

IN May the regiment was back in barracks in Peshawar, and a fortnight later marched to the little hill station of Cherat, overlooking the Peshawar Valley. John Cole had quite recovered from his wounds, and was the proud possessor of the Military Cross. His leg had mended well but he was not able to use it much. The bullet wound in his face had healed up, leaving only a rather pronounced dimple in his left cheek.

Cherat was not a very beautiful spot to live in but it was nice to get a cool breeze after the stifling heat of Peshawar where the thermometer was 114° in the shade, and would reach its usual summer maximum of 120° and over in June.

John had not been at all depressed by Major Robertson's letter, but he was a little hurt at being told not to write again—as if he were likely to! He resented the underlying insinuation that he was the sort of man who couldn't be expected to behave with ordinary decency.

He wished Beatrice had written herself, She might have used harder expressions than her godfather, but he would have treasured anything in her handwriting, and the paper on which her dear hand had rested.

He could not help being in love with her, and he knew that his love would never change. It was a pleasure to dwell on that without bothering to think of the outcome of it all.

There was a probability of the regiment going to Mesopotamia shortly, and they were again inspected.

The General examined the officers very thoroughly as to their knowledge in tactics and topography.

Every general has a few fads that get known in course of time to the troops under his command.

Some deal lightly with the purely military points and concentrate on sanitation. It rather stumps an officer commanding a territorial battalion, who has worked up his drill and field training to a high point, when he finds that the general's mind is concentrated on flies.

"Your men seem well trained, Colonel X., but there are a deuce of a lot of flies about the barracks. What's the reason of it ?"

The real reason is that there are always lots of flies everywhere, especially in India. But he mustn't say that. It sounds frivolous.

Others lay stress on the smart handling of arms, even in war time, while others are chiefly impressed by the men being "well turned out."

This particular general was a fairly practical man. He wanted to know, among other things, that an officer always carried on his person the things he should have—note-book, compass and whistle being the main points.

The Colonel brought up Lieutenant John Cole and introduced him.

After a few questions on tactics, the General asked abruptly :

"What is the bearing from here of that white domed building about a mile away to your left front ?"

"I don't know," replied John, wondering why on earth he should be supposed to know.

"No more do I," said the General, "but I can find out if I want to, can't I? I want you to find out and tell me. Just take the bearing with your compass."

"You haven't got your compass on you," he continued as John fumbled vainly in his pockets. Then turning to Colonel Andrews :

"Please see that your officers are never without note-book, compass and whistle."

Colonel Andrews saluted.

"Now you're in a fix," said the General. "It might be very important to have that bearing. You see how you let yourself in. What are you going to do?"

A bright idea struck John.

"Borrow a compass. May I have yours, sir?"

The General didn't mind his cheek, because he was delighted to have an opportunity of showing that he himself was always up to the mark.

He handed his compass to John, telling a staff officer to take the bearing at the same time, as a check.

"One hundred and forty-eight degrees, sir," said John, as he closed up the compass and handed it back to the General with a salute.

"What do you make it, Grantham?" asked the General.

"One hundred and fifty-three degrees, sir."

"A pretty poor shot," he said to John.

"Is there any guarantee with the compass?" asked John without turning a hair.

The General made no rejoinder, but turned to tell the Colonel to bring up the next officer.

"Quite a wide-awake officer, that Lieutenant Cole," he added smiling. "I ought to have sat on him for making insulting remarks about my compass, but I must say I rather like a man to speak up if he has anything to say. They generally err the other way and I get sick of hearing nothing but 'Yes, sir', 'Thank you, sir', and so on."

The Colonel had meant to tell John off for answering the General back, but in view of the latter's remark decided to say nothing about it.

With a favourable inspection report he hoped the battalion would soon be on the move, but the summer passed by without orders, and in September they returned again to Peshawar.

The frontier was still in an unsettled state, and they spent most of the winter out in the neighbourhood of Shabkadr, taking part in several engagements with the Mohmands.

Mr. Cole frequently heard from John. He hated the idea of his son being a soldier, but as he was one it was gratifying to know that he did well. John had described the affair in which he had been wounded, but Mr. Cole had not the least idea of his gallant behaviour till Mrs. Carford enlightened him, a year after the event.

He was calling at the Vicarage one afternoon in March, and the conversation turned on the war.

"It is awful to think that we are now half-way through the third year of the war," said Mrs. Carford with a sigh, "and things seem to get no better. Will it go on for ever?"

"To me it is dreadful that there should be such a thing as war," he replied. "What is the use of our

so-called civilisation if we are liable, at a moment's notice, to drop back to the savagery of the Stone Age ? All the European nations call themselves Christian nations. It is a wicked misuse of the name of Christ."

"I'm not so sure of that. The nations seem to me to *want* to be Christians, and that is one step in the right direction, even if they fail."

"One step, and what a small one, in close on two thousand years. Poor humanity !"

"Well, I don't know. One can't judge properly the times one lives in," said Mrs. Carford. Then, with a view of leading him away from this melancholy topic, she referred to John.

"He really seems to have done splendidly."

"No more than his duty. He's a good lad, and I can always trust him for that."

"I think what he did was a little more than just plain duty. Major Robertson had a letter from a friend, telling him all about it and saying that John ought to have got a V.C."

As Mr. Cole had no idea of what his son was supposed to have done—John had merely said, "got knocked over by a bullet as we were retiring, and had to lie out all night"—Mrs. Carford proceeded to tell him all she knew about the affair, and in spite of his hatred of war he could not help feeling a glow of pride.

As he got up to go, Miss Mandersfield was announced. She came in with a rush.

"Things really are moving at last," she said excitedly. "Isn't it ripping news—General Maude has captured Baghdad, and the Turks are running like hares !"

Mr. Cole left the room with a bow as Beatrice continued :

" We've been advancing everywhere on the Ancre and the Somme, and now this splendid news of Baghdad. And I've got more glorious news of my own. I'm to go out to Gwendoline in October if the war is not over by then. I suppose it will be, if things go on at this rate. Mother is going to shut up the house and live at Highfields till I come back."

She stayed to tea and they talked of Aubrey and Sinclair and the Campbell girls.

" It has been awful for me staying here doing nothing for three years, while all the others are out in the war," said Beatrice sadly.

" Oh, but it's unkind, dear, to talk like that. Really, I don't think that you and I have been doing nothing, though our work has been humble and dull."

" No, of course I don't mean that. But one has a longing to escape from the narrow surroundings of village life."

Beatrice talked of their war work, and made suggestions as to how Mrs. Carford could arrange for the secretarial work when she was gone. Then, as she rose to leave, she added :

" Please don't think it mean of me to want to get away. I do so want to."

When she got home she found a letter from Aubrey which she hastened to open and read.

He had got a D.S.O. and was on the point of leaving France. His C.O. had been given a brigade, and was off to Salonika, taking him with him on his staff. It would be interesting to see new country. Then he went on to speak of his love for her.

" I am always thinking of you, darling," he wrote,

“and I wish I could get leave to come home and see you. Goodness knows when this war will end, but when it does, I hope you won’t refuse to marry me ! Let’s be married the day it ends. My mother has evidently been talking it over with yours, as she wrote last mail, more or less asking me what my intentions were with regard to your sweet self. She thinks that if there is anything between us, our engagement ought to be announced. I wrote and said that you and I had talked all that over. We always meant to marry each other, but that there was no earthly use in announcing an engagement, and we didn’t want it done. I don’t want you to go and fall in love with any other fellow, but I also don’t want you to have to wear that silly label ‘engaged’—it spoils fun. Why should I tie you down ? ”

It was a nice letter, but Beatrice found it a little disappointing. She didn’t know why. It wasn’t that bit about the engagement ; it was rather kind of him not to want to tie her down. Aubrey was a dear darling, but somehow his love-making wasn’t very stirring.

Mrs. Mandersfield had a letter from Sinclair in April. He was very pleased to be getting a move on at last. He had taken part in the battle of Gaza, in Palestine, and was glad to find himself in a country where cavalry would really have a chance. He was rather jealous of Aubrey, but felt sure he’d score off him in the end.

Aubrey arrived in Salonika on April 16th, and took part in the advance on Doiran on April 25th.

He was sorry to have left France just before the Second Battle of the Aisne, but one can’t have everything. Macedonia was an interesting part of the

world, and there might be great doings here before long.

It was a change, too, getting away from regimental work, and he liked being on the staff. One saw everything from another point of view, and got a better perspective.

He heard frequently from Beatrice, occasionally from Dora Maynard, and now and then from other "attachments," but his heart belonged to Beatrice alone. He really must close up these other affairs, and regard the prospect of matrimony seriously. He wished his mother wouldn't make such a fuss about wanting his engagement to be announced ; there was plenty of time for that.

He accompanied his general on tours of inspection and found it interesting. General Bagshawe was very keen on hospitals. They rather bored Aubrey, but he amused himself by spotting pretty girls among the nurses. One in particular attracted him, and after seeing her several times, he took the trouble to ascertain her name. He was told it was "Garstin." An ugly name, he thought, but a deuced pretty girl.

The General and staff were invited to be present at a sing-song got up by the medical staff to cheer up the convalescents, and Aubrey was delighted to see that the pretty nurse was there. He sought an early opportunity of being introduced, and enjoyed a few minutes' chaff with her. He was fortunate enough to meet her on several other occasions, and each time he met her he thought her more enchanting.

He got as far as wondering whether staff officers were allowed to take nurses out for the day, and whether he could get her to come out some time

with him. She seemed to have taken a fancy to him, and he felt sure she was what he called "a good sort."

And then she suddenly disappeared. How exasperating. It wouldn't be difficult to find out where she was, but that was no earthly use. He had to be where his general was, and if this pretty girl wasn't there—there was nothing doing.

He put her out of his mind, or thought he did, but as a matter of fact, a vision of those wonderful eyes came constantly before him.

In June he got the sad news that his sister Isabel had been killed in the daylight air raid on London. He was dreadfully cut up about it. Isabel was his favourite sister, and he had always counted on Sinclair marrying her. It would be a great blow to Sinclair.

He mentioned it in a letter to Beatrice. He also gave her a good description of Salonika, but did not say anything about pretty nurses.

Beatrice was already beginning to make preparations for her visit to India. Things did not look at all as if the war would soon be over. The Russians had collapsed in Galicia, and the Third Battle of Ypres seemed likely to be a prolonged affair.

India was in a dangerous state of unrest, and the trouble on the frontier was as bad as ever.

Colonel Andrews was getting tired of the sight of the barren Mohmand hills when he led his battalion out again in September in the Shabkadr direction. There was more fighting which ended in a blockade of the tribe. A line of barbed-wire entanglement was stretched between the Kabul and the Swat Rivers, with fortified posts at intervals. It looked

as if they were in for a dull period, guarding the blockade line, when they suddenly received orders for Mesopotamia.

On the whole, they had had a good time during their eighteen months on the frontier. They had seen some fighting, and life in Peshawar had been very cheery in the cold weather. But there was not much fun in doing sentry-go behind a line of barbed wire, and they were glad to escape.

They were due to leave for Karachi *via* Lahore by troop trains on the night of November 10th, and their last few days were enlivened by farewell "gaffs" and farewell dinners. Several regimental bands played them down to the station, and they left to the inspiring strains of "Auld Lang Syne."

Beatrice left Tilbury by P. & O. steamer on October 8th. The last fortnight had gone by like a flash. She had been busy packing and saying good-bye. Major Robertson had advised her over her outfit and given her detailed instructions on diet and diseases.

He gave her a little bottle of quinine tabloids. She was to swallow three of them twice a week to keep the fever off. She must be careful never to go out in the sun without a "solah topee" in summer-time, even in the hills, and she was never to drink water that hadn't been boiled.

She felt sad at leaving her mother, but there was no fear of her moping or feeling dull now that she had gone to live at Highfields.

Major Robertson came to see her safely on board, hoping that he might run across old friends going out, who would look after her.

Beatrice protested that she was quite capable of

looking after herself and hated being fussed over. She was simply yearning to be absolutely independent. But she was to be disappointed. After a tour of the ship her godfather came back, bringing with him Mr. and Mrs. Blundell, of the Indian Civil Service, who would take charge of her and see her off from Bombay.

"It's all very well to talk of independence," he said, "but you'll thank me later on for getting someone to help you. It really is not such an easy job landing in Bombay, and arranging to travel up country. In any case, I had promised your mother, if I failed to find friends, to put you in charge of the captain, and cable to have you met at Bombay. So there's no escape, you see."

He saw her settled into her cabin, and then, with a "God bless you, dear, good-bye," he wrung her hand and left her.

Beatrice was vastly interested in her surroundings. She was sorry not to have a cabin to herself, but the woman who had the other berth seemed a nice person, pleasant-looking and young. She introduced herself as Mrs. Pollock, and told Beatrice that she was going out to join her husband in India. He had been with his regiment in Mesopotamia. Now they were transferred to India and he would be waiting to meet her at Bombay.

The weather was mostly dull and rainy as far as Gibraltar, and the captain was anxious about German submarines. They had not been particularly active recently, but one had to take every precaution. At night very few lights were allowed, and these, as well as the port-holes, had to be carefully screened.

After Gibraltar the weather improved, and they

had one or two bright, sunny days. But there was even greater anxiety here on the score of enemy submarines.

The alarm was practised several times, and Beatrice was amused at having to learn how to fix on her life-belt.

As soon as they reached Port Said, the captain's anxiety was at an end, and things began to look more cheerful. The ship was crowded, and people had begun to make friends.

Beatrice went ashore with the Blundells and posted a letter to her mother and another to Aubrey. Port Said was a rather evil-looking place, with a preponderance of drinking shops and touts, but it was very enjoyable getting off the ship, and rather fun bargaining for trifles in the native shops.

Going through the Canal and down the Red Sea the weather was beautiful, becoming in the end almost unpleasantly hot, and life on board was very gay. They had a cricket match in which Beatrice played, then two days' sports, a concert, and several dances. Some of the young men on board were distinctly nice, and Beatrice indulged in the mildest of flirtations. She really felt quite sorry when they reached Bombay and had to say good-bye to the ship and to each other.

She stayed a day in Bombay with the Blundells, and left on November 10th by the Punjab Mail, travelling with friends of theirs who were going to Rawal Pindi, where Gwendoline had arranged to meet her.

The train was very comfortable, and the first-class compartment, with four full-length berths, seemed enormous after the English carriages. There was always something interesting to see from the windows.

Quaint Indian villages, with women in bright-hued garments, and fascinating little brown babies. Occasionally monkeys leaping from branch to branch in the trees, or seated in family groups making a minute examination of each others' fur. Now and then a herd of black buck, solemn-looking cranes of various kinds, and gaudy peacocks.

But most interesting of all were the almost tame mynahs strutting about the station with their bright yellow beaks and legs, and the still tamer grey squirrels that were to be seen everywhere.

The train drew up at night at Lahore station, where they waited for half an hour. It was just time for bed, but Beatrice did not want to turn in till they got on the move again.

She sat looking out of the window at the moving scene on the platform. The hurrying crowd of natives in the various garbs of many different races. What enormous bundles they carried. The third-class carriages seemed always tightly packed, and yet more and more managed to squeeze themselves in, and not only themselves but their goods and chattels as well. Here was a woman carrying a large bundle in one hand and a baby in the other, followed by her husband with a large hookah, three sticks of sugar-cane over six feet long, a bundle and a tin box. They forced themselves, with slow, determined energy, into a carriage constructed to hold eight passengers, in spite of the shrill protests of the other ten occupants.

Then there were the sellers of fruit and sweetmeats, and unpleasant-looking curry stuff in small dishes made of leaves. Others sold quaint articles in carved woodwork, pocket-knives of local manufacture, drinking-cups, and cigarettes.

Here and there white people moved amongst the crowd, their European garments contrasting unfavourably with the picturesque native costumes, with their graceful folds and charming colours—not less beautiful for being often very dirty.

Then a lot of British soldiers in khaki came along, and Beatrice's thoughts flew to Aubrey.

They looked nice, healthy fellows, and had pleasant, smiling faces.

Someone mentioned that there was a troop train taking a regiment to Mesopotamia; the train was dimly visible on the opposite platform.

Presently a party of soldiers under command of an officer halted exactly in front of her carriage.

She heard the officer give the order to halt, followed by a few instructions to the men before dismissing them.

"It's ten minutes to ten now," said the voice, "and the train moves off at 10.5. Every man must be back in his carriage by ten."

He stepped back till he was within six feet of her window, then turned round, facing her, but continuing to speak to the sergeant, without looking into her carriage.

Even in the dim light the face was unmistakable, and the voice she could never forget.

It was John Cole.

Beatrice drew back into the shadow.

A native sweet-vendor came up to complain. He spoke in Hindustani and John replied in the same language. She could not understand what was said, but it was easy to gather what had happened.

Some of the men had knocked over his tray of sweets and the contents had been damaged.

She heard John say, as he moved towards the troop train :

“ All right, Sergeant, give him a couple of rupees. My money is in my carriage. Remind me to give it to you when you come to report.”

Then Beatrice's train moved off.

She turned in and lay awake some time, thinking.

What an extraordinary coincidence. Fancy meeting this Mr. Cole again in this way. It really was very interesting. She wished she had made herself known and spoken to him. Then she was glad she hadn't. He certainly looked very nice and smart in his uniform. The first sound of his voice had attracted her. She felt she knew the voice without knowing whose voice it was. Then, when he continued speaking and turned towards her, she had realised in a moment that it was John Cole.

Her memory flew back to the time when she had last heard it. Two whole years ago. How time flies.

Then she thought of what that voice was saying when she last heard it. “ I love you.” What a wild way to propose. And how had he ever had the cheek to do it ?

Then that letter. Another piece of cheek. Still, it was quite nicely—certainly very forcibly—put. He really was a decent fellow, and it was hard luck to have to be always crushing him.

However, no more crushing would be needed now. She was off to Kashmir, and he to Mesopotamia. As far apart as possible, thank goodness.

And when they met again she would be Aubrey's wife. Dear old Aubrey.

And with thoughts of Aubrey she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVII

G WENDOLINE met Beatrice at Rawal Pindi station and carried her off to Flashman's Hotel, where she had taken rooms for two months.

"It does one good to see you, Beatrice," she said as she showed her into her room. "How well you're looking, and prettier than ever."

She helped her to unpack, and then they seated themselves in comfortable chairs in the wide verandah to talk.

Beatrice told her all the home news. Isabel's sudden and tragic death had been a great blow to Lady Campbell, but she took a very brave outlook on the war and had said little about it.

Major Robertson was inconsolable at being what he called "a useless piece of wreckage cast up on the beach." His poultry and fruit and his war maps kept him from moping, however, and he was interested in giving lectures in the village on the progress of the war.

Gwendoline posted Beatrice with regard to her new surroundings.

"I think I wrote and told you about Dick, didn't I?" she said. "He joined up six months ago and is now where everyone seems to go, in Mesopotamia. It leaves me horribly lonely, and I don't know what I should have done if you hadn't come out. It is good of you."

"It's very good of you to have me. One felt so

out of it all in Hurstcombe. In the quiet old village you could hardly tell there was a war going on at all, if it weren't for the absence of the men, the increased dullness, and the casualty lists in the papers."

"Yes, it must have been rather awful. You'll find life here very different. Pindi is quite a good place in the winter and this hotel is very comfortable. I chose it because it is bang opposite the Club."

"But aren't we going on to Kashmir?"

"Not for a couple of months. Srinagar in winter is as dull as ditchwater, and the climate is worse than England. Rain and fog. Snow sometimes, but always melting and turning into slush. I've shut up the house till February."

Beatrice settled down very happily in her new life. She found lots to interest her.

Gwendoline's little boy, Richard, whom she remembered as a baby at the time of that merry Christmas party before the war, was now over four years old, and a jolly, lively little person. It amused her to help look after him and she thoroughly enjoyed the times when ayah had to go off to her meals and she was left in sole charge.

She liked the open-air life of India and the delightful combination of cold air and hot sunshine of a Punjab winter.

Rawal Pindi being a large garrison town, there was always plenty going on at the Club. They went over nearly every day to play tennis, there were frequent afternoon dances with good music, and about Christmas time, several evening dances.

There were lots of interesting young men to dance with, and both of them always had their programmes

full. Gwendoline, as a grass widow, had many admirers, and Beatrice was plagued by the too-assiduous attentions of a host of cavaliers. It was rather fun in one way, but rather unpleasant in another.

She thought it might have been better if she and Aubrey were really engaged ; that would have kept them at a distance.

She couldn't admit such a thing to herself, but she was secretly a little disappointed at the tameness of social life in India. There were plenty of dances and other gaieties, but on nothing like the fast and furious scale that she had seen in London on the two occasions since the war began when she had been up for a couple of days.

She mentioned it to Gwendoline.

"I seem to run across very ordinary humdrum people here. Nothing like the people you read of in books. Where are all the wicked ladies and the handsome Don Juans ? "

"Really, Beatrice, you quite shock me," said Gwendoline, laughing. "You seem to speak in a tone of sad regret."

"No, I don't want to feel like that about it. Still, one has been brought up to expect certain types, and it is disappointing not to find them."

"Oh, they're there, all right. But they don't always 'jump to the eye,' as the French say."

"I think it's rather rotten to write books giving such false impressions."

"Nonsense. The writers would say it was rather rotten of you to get false impressions from their books."

"Well, is it all humbug then about all these immoral beauties in Anglo-Indian society ? "

"Certainly not. But aren't they everywhere ? The only difference between our social conditions in India and those in the virtuous suburbs of London is that here we are always in the limelight, and there they frolic more securely in the twilight."

"I see that that might be so," said Beatrice. Then, changing the topic, she asked what life in Kashmir was like.

Gwendoline described her life in the capital, Srinagar. Very dull in winter, jolly in the spring, hot and steamy in the summer.

It was only five thousand feet above sea-level, so got unpleasantly warm in July and August. But they never stayed down in the summer. They went into camp, as a rule, from June to October in the higher valleys, Sonamarg, Gulmarg or Pahlgam. People who wanted their usual polo, golf, bridge and dances, went to Gulmarg in order to maintain unbroken the monotonous routine that appeals so strongly to most English people. Their motto seems to be, "Let me do to-morrow exactly what I am doing to-day, what I did yesterday, and the day before."

"I suppose Dick and I are freaks," she added, "because our motto seems to be, 'Let us do to-morrow something that we didn't do yesterday.' So we go to Sonamarg with a few friends, and get a lot of enjoyment out of climbing the hills and exploring the glaciers. It makes a nice change after bridge and dances, and freshens one up, I think."

At the end of January they packed up and started on their journey to Srinagar, leaving by motor car soon after daybreak on a bitterly cold morning.

The first ten miles of the road was on the flat, and not very interesting. After passing Baraco the road

ascended steeply, bringing them into the lower pine-forests by Tret. Then another climb to Sunnybank in Murree, about six thousand feet, where they had a good breakfast before a cheerful fire of pine logs in the small hotel. After leaving Sunnybank they ran into deep snow, but a road had been cut through the drifts enabling the car to pass without difficulty. Then a long descent to Kohala, followed by a gradual ascent to Domel, where they stopped for the night.

Starting off again early the next morning Beatrice was entranced with the ever-changing beauties of the road. The car ran sometimes for a few miles along flat table-land at the foot of the higher hills shrouded in glistening snow, then for a few miles through a narrow gorge where the road was cut out of the solid rock—a perpendicular cliff on one hand and a sheer drop to the river torrent hundreds of feet below, on the other. It was rather nervous work at first. The outer wheels seemed sometimes to be almost hanging over the edge of the precipice, but the driver seemed so calm, and Gwendoline so unmoved, that she soon grew accustomed to it.

Here and there the road had broken away and they had to cross carefully over temporary repairs, and at intervals they had to pull up where a fall of débris from above blocked the passage. They got out of the car while it was pushed and hauled over the obstruction by a gang of coolies engaged in clearing the road.

Beatrice was quite sorry when they reached Baramula, the entrance to the flat plain five thousand feet above the sea which constitutes the valley of Kashmir. From here the scenery was of quite a different nature, the car running through poplar avenues in

the midst of cultivated fields, with a ring of snow-clad mountains enclosing the plain. In a couple of hours they were in Srinagar, passing through the city to the European quarter and pulling up before the Prendergasts' house in the Munshi Bagh.

The house was built somewhat in the style of a Swiss chalet, and stood in the middle of a large garden close to the river bank. The Jhelum here was a wide and placid stream, very different to the roaring, rushing torrent on the banks of which the road from Kohala to Baramula lay. The river depends on the melting of the snows in the higher hills for its chief supply of water, and was consequently at this time of the year rather an uninteresting stream flowing feebly between its banks of mud and sand.

Beatrice was delighted with the inside of the house, especially with her large bedroom, where a wood fire gave forth a cheerful blaze.

Among the pictures in the room she noticed a group taken at Highfields in 1914, just before the war. All the Campbells were in it except Gwendoline. It was a particularly good picture of Aubrey, who was standing by her side holding a tennis racquet.

They turned in early after their long journey. Beatrice found her bed very comfortable, and she was tired. It was very cosy falling gradually asleep with the flickering firelight dancing on the white ceiling, and her thoughts flew back to dear old Hurstcombe, and her mother, and that happy summer before the war, and Aubrey.

The next three months flew by happily and rapidly. Beatrice never had a dull moment. There was a large community in Srinagar, mostly consisting of retired officers of the army and civil service, state

officials, and business men. The Club was close by, there was a pleasant gathering there every evening. There were a few dances and they often had bridge after dinner.

Visiting the bazaars was a never-ending source of delight. She liked rummaging about in the old shops for curios, admiring the beautiful Persian carpets, and watching the patient artists at work on silver or copper ware, and papier-mâché.

The mission hospital run by Doctor Neve was an interesting place to visit. She knew one of the nurses there and used often to go up and watch the reception of the patients, wonderful people from Thibet and Baltistan as well as the local Kashmiris. They also went one day to see Mr. Tyndale-Biscoe's C.M.S. School. The Hindu and Mahommedan boys were giving a gymnastic display, living up to the proud motto of the school, "In all things be men." She came to the conclusion that there were some very fine Englishmen in this distant corner of the Empire.

In April they had news of the big German attack on Amiens, resulting in heavy British losses, and Sinclair wrote from Palestine, not very cheerfully. It was fine serving under Allenby, and they had some exciting experiences, but the Turks had checked their advance and had driven them back in one or two places. Altogether, the fourth year of the war did not look too bright and there were no signs of its coming to an end.

Dick wrote from Mesopotamia with better news. The Turks seemed to have been quite routed. He had been at the capture of Khan Baghdadie in March, and since then there had not been much fighting. He hoped to get sixty days' leave in June if things

were quiet, and would probably bring along a friend or two who would be grateful for a breath of fresh air. He asked Gwendoline to fix up the camp in their old site at Sonamarg and he would join her there as soon as possible after June 1st. She could probably get some of their old friends to share in the camp.

Gwendoline arranged for the Hughes to accompany them.

Mr. Hughes was a man of about thirty, in the Educational Service. He had been rejected for the war owing to a variety of ailments. He was a pleasant fellow and a noted good hand at camp arrangements. His wife, who was five years younger, was a cheerful, robust young woman, always ready to take part in any fun that was going. They were quite the right sort of people to help run a cheery camp, and Dick was delighted when he heard Gwendoline's choice.

He was getting very tired of Baghdad now that there was no fighting going on, and was longing to get off on leave.

Things had been dull in Mesopotamia since the beginning of the year, and Colonel Andrews almost wished the regiment had never left Peshawar.

John found the country and the Arabs very interesting and the palm-trees on the banks of the Tigris picturesque. But after five months' garrison duty he began to feel that he never wanted to see an Arab or a palm-tree again.

He heard from home that his father had been thinking of leaving Hurstcombe and going back to Lancashire, but Henry had persuaded him to stay on. The fact that his wife was buried in the Hurstcombe cemetery gave the old man a sentimental

attachment to the place that finally decided him to stay.

John often dropped in at the Club in Baghdad for a game of bridge, and made many friends there. His general cheeriness, his singing, and his useful attainments on the piano made him popular wherever he went.

Among others he made the acquaintance of Dick Prendergast, who was serving with the Royal Engineers.

As they sat chatting together at the Club one evening late in May the conversation turned on the subject of leave.

"I am told that I can get sixty days' leave if I care to apply for it," said John ; " but I'm not very keen about it. I'm quite happy here and wouldn't know where to go if I took the leave. But my leg has been troubling me a bit, and the doctor says that if I don't take it they'll send me off on sick leave."

"Never throw away the chance of leave," Dick replied. "There's no hope of anything exciting happening in these parts for the remainder of the war, and Mespot under peace conditions is a pretty dull place."

"Well, I suppose I shall take it. But India is the only place one can get to, and loafing round an Indian hill station for a couple of months is not in my line."

"Why not try Kashmir ?"

"Yes, I'd thought of that. I must get some tips from someone's been there."

"Why not get some tips from me ? I've not only been there, but I live there. I'm in the Forest Department, and my wife is in Srinagar now, waiting

for her loving husband to come home on leave. I'm off as soon as I can get away. The best tip I can give you on Kashmir is this—come along with me. We're going into camp at Sonamarg and I am expected to bring two or three cheery fellows with me. The idea was to get hold of men like yourself, who wanted a change, and didn't know where to go. Harris, of the Gunners, is coming along. Why shouldn't you come, too ? ”

John was delighted at the idea, but thought it the right thing to make a few excuses. Enthusiastic people often make offers of this sort without meaning them seriously. Dick was quite genuine, however, and John was only too glad to yield to his persuasion.

Dick wrote to Gwendoline to tell her that he hoped to arrive about June 8th, and he was bringing with him two subalterns, Cole, a very good fellow, in the Infantry, and Harris, in the Gunners.

A day before they started he got a wire from Harris saying that he couldn't come. He had had to give up his leave in favour of another fellow who had really urgent private affairs, and he didn't expect to get away till the autumn.

In Srinagar Gwendoline was making preparations for the camp at Sonamarg. They were to go by boat to Gandarbal at the mouth of the Sind River, and then walk and ride the three marches up the Sind Valley.

She wanted to take Baby Richard with her, but the doctor advised her to leave him behind. He was rather young for camp life, and had not been very well. She had an English nurse for him now as well as the faithful ayah, and friends had offered to take them in for the three months they would be away.

Beatrice was full of excitement at the prospect of getting up into the higher mountains. She had enjoyed Srinagar very much, and she had never seen anything so beautiful as the spring, when all the fruit gardens were in blossom, and the wild irises grew in profusion along the river banks. The snow had been melting rapidly and the Jhelum was now a majestic river, very different to the diminutive stream of the winter days. Both banks were lined with houseboats of every size and description, from the luxurious square-built barge that was merely a floating house, to the humble, old-fashioned native "doonga," which was really a boat and certainly not a house. They were to go to Gandarbal in doongas, because they were light and easy to handle, and Gwendoline always preferred them as being more in keeping with their surroundings. There was something rather vulgar and ostentatious about the magnificent English-pattern house-boats that jarred on an artistic nature.

"I hope you won't mind the humble doonga," she said to Beatrice. "I love them. They are just the simple native boats with matting roofs and walls. They are all right except in heavy rain and a gale. Then your things get blown about and you get drenched in bed. But it doesn't do any harm. Dick and I have had several adventures of that sort, but we've never been any the worse for it."

"I shan't mind it a bit," Beatrice replied. "I'm sure it will be great fun."

"I hope you'll like camp life. I've sent on ten tents and most of the paraphernalia so as to have some shelter to get into in case we arrive in bad

weather. Two tents will do for us and the servants on the march."

"What an appalling number of tents for four people."

"Oh, they're only Swiss cottage tents, not very large, and you forget we're not going to be four people, but seven."

"Of course. It was silly of me to forget Dick and his friends. Who is he bringing with him?"

"He is bringing a subaltern from an infantry regiment and a gunner. I forget their names for the moment. No, by the way, he wrote later saying one of them couldn't come, so there will only be six of us, and we'll have an odd tent in case anyone else turns up later."

She took Beatrice down to show her the boats they were to travel in, and they went on to the bazaar to purchase stores and supplies.

On the last day of the month they had their bedding taken down to the boats and slept the night on board. They had four doongas altogether. One for themselves, one for the Hughes, and a cook-boat each for the kitchen and servants.

About half an hour before sunrise on the next morning the boats moved quietly away from the bank and started on their journey down the river. Beatrice awoke as soon as they began to move and, slipping on her dressing-gown, seated herself in a deck-chair in the small verandah near the bow to enjoy every detail of the beautiful panorama.

The dawn was wonderful, lighting up the distant snow-peaks with a delicate tinge of pink, then the nearer hills that stand over the city of Srinagar, Nanga Parbat, with its picturesque old fort, and the

Takht-i-Suleiman with its sacred shrine on the summit.

The boat glided gently down the stream with very little aid from the boatmen. Just one man poling in front, and his wife in the stern, steering with a heart-shaped paddle, and attending to a pot of boiling rice at the same time.

As they approached the first bridge with the Maharajah's palace on the left bank, the sun's rays reached the picturesque houses of the city, which lined the river bank, bringing into prominence wonderful contrasts of colour. Walls of many hues of brown, roofs covered with grass and occasional poppies, strings of flaming scarlet chilies hanging to dry from window ledges, and on the river bank itself, native women washing or drawing water, clothed in garments of every colour.

The old wooden bridges with their broad piers of rough-cut logs placed criss-cross, added a touch of singular beauty to the scene. There are no bridges in the world like the old wooden bridges of Kashmir.

Beatrice felt that this was very like paradise on earth. And then she felt a twinge of conscience. It seemed to her that it must be very wicked to allow oneself such intense enjoyment, while this awful war was raging everywhere and causing untold suffering to millions. And Aubrey. Dear Aubrey might be lying at this very moment on some field of battle, wounded or dying.

Her sad reflections were broken by a voice from inside the boat.

"Up already, Beatrice," called Gwendoline. "You are an early bird."

“ Oh, don't talk, please. This is too beautiful for words.”

“ Nonsense, dear. I'm dying to talk. And I want my tea.” She called to the boatman to bring up the cook-boat.

The ayah brought a small tray with cups of tea and plates of fruit. Beatrice felt unhappy at the rude shattering of her day-dreams, but there was no doubt that a cup of tea was very delightful.

After tea it was time to dress. A lovely hot bath was waiting for her, but she did not enjoy it as she should have. She grudged every minute that kept her shut up inside the boat when there were such wonderful things to see outside.

Soon after passing the last bridge they pulled up for breakfast beneath a large plane tree on the left bank. The Hughes joined them and they all sat down together at the small camp table in the shade of the tree, with clumps of small wild iris at their feet.

Mrs. Hughes was a nice, cheerful young person, who had taken a great liking to Beatrice. The two had spent many mornings together exploring the quaint shops in the city, and Beatrice fully returned her affection.

Mr. Hughes was a pleasant sort of man, and very capable. Gwendoline had put him in charge of the party, and he was to make all arrangements for ponies and coolies, and fix the times for their marches and halts.

After breakfast the boats started again, but the party remained on shore, preferring to walk for a change. It was easy to keep up with the boats owing to the curves of the river which enabled them

to make a short cut across a bend any time that they wanted to catch up.

They boarded the boats again later, and finally pulled up for the day at the mouth of the Sind River, opposite Shadipore. They could have gone on further, but there was no hurry, and it was a pleasant change to get ashore and have the chairs put in the shade. The boats were really quite comfortable to travel in, but one felt a little cramped in them. It was nicer lolling in a camp chair ashore with nothing over one's head but a canopy of green leaves through which one caught glimpses of the turquoise sky.

The next day was rather different. On the Jhelum they had been placidly floating down-stream and the boatmen had easy work. On the Sind River they were going up-stream against a strong current and the men had a really hard day.

They reached Gandarbal, at the mouth of the Sind Valley, in the evening, and Mr. Hughes went ashore to arrange for coolies and riding ponies.

He believed in making an early start, and Beatrice was as keen as he was to get on the move before dawn, but the others grumbled when he suggested getting away by 5.30 a.m. That meant getting up at four and Mrs. Hughes and Gwendoline protested loudly at the prospect of having their slumbers cut short. But Mr. Hughes and Beatrice carried the day, and the cavalcade were ready to start off next morning at a quarter to six. Not a bad effort at punctuality for the first day.

The weather was fine, but there were heavy storm clouds behind the high peak of Haramuk, and there was every chance of their getting a drenching before reaching camp.

The road ran with an almost imperceptible ascent through endless rice fields of an incredible emerald green. There is no green in the world quite like that of young rice ; the term "emerald " applies to it more nearly than to any other natural vegetation. The entrance to the valley is several miles wide, but as they rode on they felt the mountain walls closing in on them on either side, till, on reaching Kangan, where they were to halt for the night, they had the sensation of being in a new world, entirely cut off from the steamy heat of the rice fields and the lower valley of Kashmir.

Camp was pitched under a magnificent group of walnut trees.

The next day, starting off at an early hour, they found themselves quite shut in in the narrow valley. The road lay for the most part by the side of the foaming torrent of the Sind River. The ascent was in many places quite steep and the air was indescribably fresh and exhilarating. Beatrice rode on ahead with Mr. Hughes, entranced with the wild beauty of the scenery. They talked very little, the roar of the stream making conversation almost impossible. And Beatrice didn't want to talk. She just wanted to think and enjoy.

They halted for breakfast under gigantic pine trees, in a mossy glade some distance away from the river, and after breakfast lay on their backs to doze for an hour to give the baggage a chance of getting ahead.

Camp was pitched for the night at Gond, in a wild rocky gorge some height above the river, where its roar was toned down into a soothing lullaby.

The next day's march was even more beautiful.

Here and there they crossed the remains of the winter snow lying in drifts in shady corners below high cliffs where very little sunlight ever penetrated.

In the early afternoon they crossed the river by the little wooden bridge below Sonamarg village, and turning to the left emerged, after a short ascent, on to the beautiful grassy slopes that constitute the "marg."

The snows had only just melted at this height—they were now nearly at nine thousand feet—and the wild flowers had hardly had time to display themselves, but Beatrice noticed amongst the bright green grass mauve primulas and small golden star-like flowers lying close to the ground.

She felt that the scene was too beautiful for words. It was on her lips to say "gorgeous," but her very best word seemed like a profanation of holy things, and she kept silent, as she rode on apart from the others, following Mr. Hughes, who led the way to camp.

He guided the party straight across the meadowland to the highest point where the marg ended at the foot of the higher mountains and the forest began again.

The tents were pitched at the edge of the forest of giant pine and spruce, beside a rippling stream of crystal water. They were not arranged, as in an ordinary camp, in lines and squares, but each tent was placed separately at different levels wherever a sufficient area of flat ground could be found.

The two large tents that were to serve for dining and writing were pitched in the middle of the camp. Beatrice's tent was next, then two tents for Gwen-doline and Dick. The Hughes' tents were pitched

about fifty yards off, higher up and just inside the edge of the forest, and a little further away were the two tents for the visitors.

It was great fun settling in to one's own tent, and it took the remainder of the day to get comfortable.

The tiny village of Sonamarg, which is buried in snow for six months in the year, boasts a Post and Telegraph office, being on the important trade route leading to Leh in Ladakh, and Gwendoline had sent down for letters as soon as they arrived. The messenger returned just as they sat down to dinner, with a huge bundle of letters and newspapers for everybody, and a telegram for herself, which she opened and read aloud.

"Hope to be with you evening 9th. Two of us. Love. Dick."

"That's from Bombay on the fifth," she commented ; "probably just as they were getting into the train. I don't see how they can get here in time, but we'll expect them when we see them."

Everyone was tired, and they turned in very soon after dinner.

Beatrice fell asleep almost as soon as her head touched the pillow, lulled by the sound of a distant owl hooting and the gentle murmur of the little stream. It was fairyland.

The next four days were spent in improving the camp site, making paths from tent to tent, and a sort of main road down the centre of the camp. Beatrice thoroughly enjoyed the work and lent a hand also in collecting firewood, rolling logs of dead wood down the hill-side to form a store for camp fires.

Dick sent another telegram from Gandarbal on

the ninth. They hoped to get through in one day, if they could get decent ponies to ride, and changes at the two halting places.

Evening came on and with it a thunderstorm and heavy rain and as they rose from the dinner-table Gwendoline said :

“ They won’t get here to-night in this storm. It’s not easy to get decent riding ponies in the valley, and I expect they have probably had to pull up at Gond.”

A moment later there was a terrific crash of thunder, and when the last rumble had died away they heard the sound of horses’ hoofs outside the tent and a cheerful voice shouted :

“ Gwen, where are you ? Come and welcome two drowned rats. And two large whiskies-and-sodas please for tired travellers.”

Gwendoline jumped from her seat and flew to the doorway of the tent, lifting the flap and peering out into the darkness.

“ Come on in, Dick darling,” she called out, “ and bring in your friend. You’ll flood the tent but we won’t mind.”

A minute later she was embraced by Dick, who entered bringing John in with him. John stood blinking his eyes at the sudden transition from darkness into light, and immediately before him he saw Beatrice.

CHAPTER XVIII

BEFORE John had a chance of displaying his embarrassment, Dick proceeded with the introduction.

“Here’s Mr. Cole, dear.”

Then greeting the Hughes and Beatrice warmly, he extended the introduction to them.

“I’ve met Mr. Cole before,” said Beatrice holding out her hand. “You might all have known him as he comes from Hurstcombe.”

“Great Scot,” said Dick. “What a surprise! What a pity we never talked family details.”

“Well, here’s best of luck to you all, anyway,” he continued as he handed a whiskey-and-soda to John and raised his own glass.

The two half-drowned heroes swallowed their revivers and left the tent to get out of their wet things and into hot baths. Gwendoline accompanied them to give the necessary orders and to get out dry things for both of them. There was no hope of their kit arriving till the next morning.

Beatrice excused herself and went to bed.

In half an hour’s time the two men returned to the mess tent arrayed in makeshift attire from Dick’s wardrobe.

“You must excuse our kit, Mrs. Hughes,” said Dick. “Our minds are entirely concentrated on food. We don’t care what we look like, as long as we get something to eat.”

"I'm sure we don't mind, either," she replied, "but you really look quite decent, and your flannels fit Mr. Cole as if they were made for him."

"Yes, we're pretty much of a size. I shall have to see he doesn't go off with them."

"Now then, John, fall to," he added as the khidmatgar handed plates of hot pea-soup to them.

After dinner they lit cigars, and told the harrowing tale of their wild ride up the valley on village ponies. They made an early move for bed.

Beatrice had turned in an hour ago, but not to sleep. She lay awake thinking over the situation.

What a ghastly affair ! Who could have imagined such an impossible coincidence ? That Dick's pal should turn out to be John Cole ! Now what on earth was going to happen ? If he was a decent fellow he would pack up and go. But supposing he stayed ? It would be very embarrassing. If he was a friend of her host's, she couldn't be openly rude to him. Then there might be a repetition of that awful scene in Honeysuckle Lane three years ago. She could not make up her mind what to do. She must talk it over with Gwendoline to-morrow, but even that would be difficult because she could never bring herself to tell her about his frantic declaration of love. If she was up early and lucky enough to meet John alone she might say to him: "You must understand how embarrassing this situation is to me. I rely on you to invent some excuse and get away at once." But that was rather hard luck on him. After all he was one of those brave fellows who had done well in the war, and it would be cruel to ruin his well-deserved holiday. He was nothing to her as John Cole, but just in the abstract, as a

young officer on leave from the heat and unpleasantness of Mesopotamia, he ought to be fairly treated.

Gwendoline talked the matter over with Dick.

"I say, old boy. You've rather put your foot in it. Fancy bringing one of the Fir Grove family as your guest."

"I'm awfully sorry, Gwen. But how could I know anything about it. When one knocks up against fellows at the Club one just sizes them up as being good fellows and gentlemen, or the reverse. What's the matter with the people you call 'Fir Grove' ?"

"Oh nothing at all, really. The Coles are business people from Lancashire, and father and mother rather resented their coming to Hurstcombe, and have always refused to know them. The sort of silly affair that social distinctions give rise to. I don't know anything more about them than that, as I've been away from Highfields nearly all the time since the Coles took up their abode at Fir Grove."

"Well, we mustn't let rubbish of that sort interfere with our enjoyment of our holiday. He is really a first-rate fellow and I am very fond of him. Beatrice knew him, anyway, and welcomed him."

"That's just the point, you silly. She did know him, and she shook hands. But she most certainly did not welcome him. I was looking straight at her and really I can't describe the look on her face. I don't want to use melodramatic terms but I should say it expressed 'agony'."

"Fiddlesticks. Beatrice is too decent a sort to be agonised by meeting a young man who happens to belong to a family not on her mother's visiting list."

"Well, never mind. We'll see how things pan out to-morrow," concluded Gwendoline.

John Cole tucked himself into bed, revelling in the comfort of clean dry sheets after a long and dirty journey. His mind was full of bewildering thoughts, but he was too tired to lie awake long.

Not for one moment did he ask himself ; "What am I to do now ?" "What will Beatrice do ?" and so on. He had just one all-absorbing thought. Beatrice was here. Marvel of marvels. Darling Beatrice. How he loved her. As she shook hands with him he had looked straight into her dear eyes. They seemed to express fear, more than resentment. Would they ever express love ? Darling Beatrice.

Everyone was up early next morning. John was awake before they brought his early tea. However tired and lazy one may feel one wakes early in camp. A thin sheet of canvas is all that separates one from the beautiful world of nature without. The first ray of sunlight pierces the wall of the tent, birds sing and chirrup on the ridge pole or in the branches of the nearest tree, and sounds of human voices are magnified as if the tent were a microphone.

They had a jolly breakfast at about half-past eight, laid on a table under the trees in the open air.

Conversation was general and very gay.

After breakfast they scattered to their various tasks. Dick was going off exploring with John and Mr. Hughes, but had some letters to write first. Gwendoline busied herself with house-keeping.

John saw Beatrice wandering down the marg on the other side of the stream and seized his opportunity. He must have a word with her alone.

He crossed the stream by the stepping-stones, and

hastening down the meadow soon found himself at her side.

She looked up with an expression that might be amazement or annoyance, as John said :

" I caught sight of you over here, Miss Mandersfield, and I seized the opportunity of speaking to you."

" I wanted to be alone," she interrupted angrily. " I don't want to be rude, but will you please go away."

" Certainly. In a moment. But for God's sake allow me just a few words. Don't be afraid, I'm not going to say anything to offend you. I quite see that my presence here is upsetting to you. May I, please, put my point of view before you and then all will be plain sailing."

" Perhaps you are right. Say what you want to, and please be quick about it."

" What I want to say is this. My feelings for you are unaltered and will never alter. No, please, don't interrupt me," he went on as he saw her lips parted to reply, " let me just have my say once and for all. That finishes that topic. Now I want to say that I quite understand your position. You don't want to see me, firstly, because I am one of the Coles, secondly, because of what has passed between us. Well, can't we make a sort of truce ? I will promise you to behave as if you were no more to me than any other woman. Will you do the same for me ? Don't treat me as that outcast, John Cole, who dared to make love to you. Let me be simply a decent sort of subaltern on leave from the war."

" That is one alternative. The other is that I should go away. If my presence here is really intolerable

to you, I'll invent some excuse and get away to-morrow. Am I to go ? ”

“ Yes, please. I think it's the only way.”

“ All right. Good-bye, then. I'll see Dick and fix up for ponies this afternoon,” he said as he turned to leave her.

He walked a few paces in the direction of camp when she called after him :

“ Mr. Cole.”

He turned again to face her.

“ Don't go. I'm afraid I was an awful beast just now. But, really, your coming here has startled me out of my senses. I'll accept your terms. It would be too tragic to send you off, and we don't want tragedy any more that we want melodrama. I'll take you on your merits, simply as an officer on leave from Mesopotamia, if you'll stick to your word and make no reference to the past. Shake hands on it.”

“ Thank you, Miss Mandersfield,” he replied, bravely releasing her hand after the slightest pressure of a moment, repressing a longing to retain it in his grasp. He must be true to his promise henceforth, and cut out the love part. After all it was only a matter of mentality ; he must just induce his mind to regard her as an ordinary young woman of no special interest.

He returned to camp leaving her to pursue her wanderings on the marg.

She got back before lunch, and Gwendoline at once seized on her with a view of fixing up things about Mr. Cole.

“ It's most unfortunate his being what he is and dropping into our midst in this way. But Dick says he's an A.1. fellow, quite a hero in the war, and

the most popular man in Baghdad. So what are we to do ? For the rest of us it doesn't matter tuppence, we don't really belong to Hurstcombe now, and out in the big world we take people as they are. But it's different for you, having met him before and all that."

Remembering the look she had seen in Beatrice's eyes last night, she expected Beatrice to refer to the unpleasantness of the situation and to suggest that Dick might invent some excuse to get John to move on, but to her surprise she simply replied :

"He's quite a harmless young man, as far as I know, and his being here won't affect me in the slightest degree."

Gwendoline was delighted to think there would be no need to upset their plans.

"It's good of you," she said, "to take it like that, and it simplifies matters nicely. I don't think I'll mention it to mother or to Aubrey; it would be altogether too upsetting for them. I think he's the one I remember Aubrey referring to as 'The Bounder', isn't he ?"

"Yes, I expect so," replied Beatrice. "But he got that nickname rather unfairly. It belonged to another of the family. This particular Cole has never been anything of the sort."

"Well, that's all right, thank goodness. Now we'll all be happy," said Gwendoline leading the way to the dining tent. "Lunch is ready. Hammer that gong and let the others know. We won't wait for them."

Within the next few days they had all settled down quite happily, and Beatrice found John true to his agreement. She was equally true on her side, and,

putting all snubbing thoughts of Fir Grove, and indignant thoughts of Honeysuckle Lane out of her mind, found him a very nice fellow and a pleasant addition to the party.

A week later things were even more serene. At first in spite of his cheery, casual manner she thought she could detect inflections in his voice that indicated danger, but now it was as if the past had been quite blotted out from his memory. Men always say that sort of stuff about undying and unalterable love but it's all humbug. A man—or a woman either for that matter—can easily cure himself of this incurable complaint. John was evidently quite cured.

She wrote to Aubrey fairly often, telling him all about their doings, and also to Sinclair. But she thought it better to leave the subject of John Cole out of her letters.

The weather was glorious and they made the most of it. The monsoon was not due till next month and they could generally reckon on a fine day. Now and then they had tremendous thunderstorms, terrifying but beautiful, and sudden bursts of wind that threatened to blow the tents away, but the storms were mostly at night, and when they came on by day only lasted for a few hours. They only had one steady downpour keeping them in the whole day, and that was not half bad fun for a change. They wrote letters and played silly games, and a rubber or two of bridge.

The marg was looking its best now, covered with such a mass of forget-me-nots and Alpine wild flowers, that one hated treading on it.

The camp lay at the foot of a long wooded spur

jutting out from the main range, and on the south side of the spur was a narrow rocky valley down which the Tejwaz stream flowed to join the Sind river below the bridge.

High up on the south side of this small valley one could see the snouts of two or three glaciers projecting over the grey rocks.

On the other side of the spur a path led down to the village of Sonamarg on the main road leading to the head of the Sind valley at Baltal and the Zoji Pass.

Gwen and Dick had named all the various points of the landscape for convenience in discussing arrangements for picnics or exploration.

The high, barren peak on the far side of the river was Mount Sinai. The long ridge above the village, Post Office Hill. The spur above the camp, Gujar's Hill. The glaciers were numbered one, two, and three.

The party were all good walkers except Mr. Hughes who was keen enough, but often had to give in if they climbed to any great height. Anything over twelve thousand feet was difficult for him. John was the hardiest of them all, but sometimes found himself a little handicapped by his leg.

The three women were all splendid but Gwendoline was not really strong and often preferred to stay behind with Mrs. Hughes at the halfway halt. Beatrice enjoyed the "all-day-picnics" immensely. She objected to their being called picnics, a feeble little word calling to mind quiet walks in country lanes, or on the moor, carrying packets of sandwiches in tissue paper, and jam tarts that made one's fingers sticky, to be eaten in some shady nook not

always free from intrusion. And then an easy saunter or drive home in the late afternoon.

Here the setting was different and everything was different. There was the exhilaration of the grandeur and immensity of the mountains, forests and glaciers, and on the higher ridges the sensation of aloofness, the knowledge that no other human beings were within miles of you. It was inspiring to feel that if your movements were followed by prying eyes, the eyes were those of bear, or stag, or perhaps even a leopard.

They usually started out about eight o'clock in the morning after a light breakfast, taking with them a coolie to carry the tiffin basket. They walked and climbed till about midday when they halted to enjoy lunch with incredible appetites. An hour later they moved on again, halting for tea about four o'clock at some point within about six miles from home, and so back to camp in time for a hot bath and dinner.

After lunch when the more energetic ones set out for further adventures, those who felt lazy or not quite up to the mark, cut out this part of the programme, contenting themselves with a short and easy walk to the place fixed on for tea where the others joined them later. Gwendoline and the Hughes often took advantage of this, leaving the more ambitious exploits to Beatrice, Dick and John.

They took the peaks and glaciers in turn, Dick mapping out on each occasion a circular route so that they were on fresh ground both going and coming.

There was no serious climbing or need for ropes. It was not difficult to find practicable ways of approach to the peaks and glaciers, and if the road was blocked

they turned off on to something equally interesting. They did not as a rule venture far on to the glaciers, and as soon as they found themselves in the neighbourhood of crevasses, and began to perform involuntary slides, Dick ordered a retreat. If they wanted to go further they must come up another day with ropes and ice-axes and so on. But nobody wanted that. Real Alpine climbing has a charm of its own, but it is a serious business and not to be lightly undertaken by amateurs.

All they wanted was the sheer joy of climbing up and up, higher and higher, and Beatrice was always cross when Dick suggested turning back.

John's behaviour was absolutely beyond reproach. A party of six naturally divides itself into three pairs, and Beatrice had begun by fearing lest she should find herself paired with him. To obviate the possibility of such an unpleasant contingency she always made a rush to fasten herself on to Mr. Hughes or Dick. But she soon found there was no need for her to worry ; John did not try to force his company on her. In spite of her manœuvring there were occasions when it would have been quite natural for him to take his place by her side. But he made no effort to do so, preferring to make a third with one of the other couples.

It often happened that he and she were the only really ambitious ones of the party, and inclined for further strenuous exertions after lunch, but on such occasions John tactfully saved the situation by insisting on Dick shaking off his sloth and accompanying them.

That was to her the real enjoyment of the day, the further explorations by the party of three.

There were times when everyone was inspired by a desire for the second half of the programme. That was generally rather dull. It meant that they didn't get very far or do anything very venturesome.

But when it was just the three of them it was glorious. They got twice as far as they would have done if they had had the lazy ones with them, and it was only on these occasions that they had any exciting experiences.

They often had to get over a really difficult and dangerous bit of ground, and occasionally they took risks on the glaciers that they had no business to take. It was heavenly peering into deep crevasses to admire the indescribable gem-like blues and greens of the ice pierced by the sun's rays, but it was distinctly dangerous for a party not roped together.

On one occasion Dick had gone on ahead, and she found herself alone with John. They were at the foot of a high cliff on the edge of a glacier. Beatrice caught sight of a splendid specimen of a blue poppy growing in a crevice about twenty feet up the rock, and determined to get it. Gwendoline wanted one to see if she could get it to grow in her garden at Srinagar.

The blue poppy is perhaps the most beautiful flower in the world, but like many of the rarer mountain flowers, it does not flourish when it is transferred to civilised surroundings. The vivid, transparent light blue of its petals is only to be seen to perfection when the plant is growing where God meant it to grow—in barren, rocky surroundings between ten and twelve thousand feet above the sea.

"Dick was saying it was time to turn back," said

Beatrice. "You go on and bring him back this way. I shan't go any further. I'll amuse myself getting that blue poppy out by the roots for Gwen and you can pick me up when you return."

"Better let me do it for you. It's not far up, but you'll find it a difficult job."

"No thanks. I can manage it quite well. I'll take off my shoes and you can see there are lots of little crevices for me to get my toes into. It's not very high up, even if I was silly enough to tumble."

"All right, Miss Mandersfield," said John, as he moved off to catch up Dick.

He climbed for five minutes without seeing any sign of him, and then he was rather puzzled what to do. He might wander on and fail to find him altogether, and then he might lose his way back to Beatrice, and she would be left waiting, and perhaps they'd all get benighted. It wasn't worth risking. He had better return to her.

As he neared the corner behind which he had left her to secure the poppy he thought he heard cries of anguish. His heart almost stopped beating as he tore down the hill in the direction of the sounds. Turning the corner of the rock he caught sight of Beatrice holding on to the face of the cliff like a fly on a wall and was relieved to find that the cries of anguish were only laughter.

"I've got the poppy out with most of its roots, but not all. They have such gigantic roots. Now I'm stuck and can't get down again," she said laughing. "It's very silly of me, but I really can't manage it. You'll have to help me down. I'm quite all right here. Could stay here for ever.

I could get down easily, too, if I had eyes in the back of my head or at the end of my toes. I've been groping about with my toes till they're quite sore, but I can't find the cracks to put them in."

"That's all right. You will be able to take time to choose. There are only two ways of getting down. I can stand just below you, you can slide down the rock and I'll catch you. You'll bark your shins but I'll guarantee no other injury.

"The other way is for me to climb up to you and take each of your feet in turn and put them into the proper places. That'll be an easy job. The only difficult bit is the four feet just below you; after that it's simple enough. If you slip and we both go head-over-heels it's a small drop and we'll only get a bump or two. What do you want me to do?"

"I don't like the idea of throwing myself down for you to catch. You might miss me. So you'd better try the foot dodge."

John climbed up the rock till he could reach her feet.

"Now let me take your right foot. Stretch down as far as you can but don't let go the grip with your hands. That's right. Got your toes in firmly? Now the left foot. That one all right? Now the right again."

"Thanks. I can manage now. If you get out of the way I'll do the rest easily."

John descended and stood by in case of accidents. She slipped in the last six feet and he caught her for a moment to steady her.

"Won't you sit down for a moment now, while I halloo for Dick," he said as he left her to put on her shoes. "If I can't find him I'll be back in ten minutes

and we'll have to give him up and get down alone. The tea party will be wondering what has become of us."

He returned within the time, bringing Dick back with him.

"I haven't been very far," Dick explained, "but I'm bothered if I could find my way back to you. One thinks it so easy to mark down a spot, but when you turn to look back there are dozens of spots just like it."

They got back to tea a little late. Beatrice described her adventures to the party as she handed Gwendoline the blue poppy in triumph.

After tea they set out for home. John paired off with Mrs. Hughes, and Beatrice walked with Gwendoline.

"I never felt so silly in my life," she said, "having to be rescued from such a stupid predicament."

"How romantic, dear. Aubrey would be quite jealous if he were here."

"Dear old Aubrey. I wish he was. It seems years since I last saw him."

Gwendoline took the opportunity of talking about her brother. She couldn't understand exactly how things stood between him and Beatrice. It was an accepted thing that they were to be married some day. Why wasn't the engagement announced?

Beatrice told her all about it, finishing her remarks with: "So he thought it would be better not to be formally engaged yet. I suppose he's right. But as far as I'm concerned I'd sooner it was given out. It makes it easier for other people, don't you think?"

Left to herself that evening while the others played

bridge she thought over the events of the day. It had been one of their finest climbs. How annoying to get stuck on the cliff like that, and to have to yell for help. A nuisance, too, that Mr. Cole was the only man about. He had managed it very nicely, and had not taken the slightest advantage of his position. If he hadn't caught her at the bottom she would have tumbled over, and even if she had not hurt herself she would have looked very silly. He did it very cleverly. Then after he had steadied her on her feet he just dropped her like a hot coal. And walking home he hadn't made the slightest effort to get near her. He always seemed to prefer walking with Mrs. Hughes when he could manage it. He seemed quite taken with her. Well, that was a harmless affair, anyway. As far as she herself was concerned it was nice to know that he could be absolutely trusted now. He had quite cured himself of his silliness. And in three weeks he would be gone.

CHAPTER XIX

BEATRICE wrote a long letter to Aubrey telling him of all their doings in Kashmir. He got the letter at the same time as one from his mother. In her letter, Lady Campbell referred again to the matter of his engagement to Beatrice, and said that she thought it was wrong to delay the announcement any further, if they were both unchanged in their intentions.

June was a hot steamy month in Macedonia, and Aubrey felt cross at this interference with his private affairs. However, his mother was probably right. So in his letter to Beatrice he mentioned the subject of the engagement, asking her to reply at once so that he could let his mother know.

The next day he was knocked over with malaria and two days later he was in the Base Hospital at Salonika.

He slept little on the night of his arrival, but fell off into a deep slumber in the following morning, from which he was awakened in the early hours, according to military regulations, to have his temperature taken and recorded.

"Oh bother my temperature, nurse," he said as he became aware of a woman's presence. "I do want to sleep. Come and take it later."

"Sorry," a voice replied. "Doctor's orders. It's got to be done."

He started from the pillow as he recognised Rose

Garstin's voice. He knew he couldn't have mistaken it. It was just a year since he had last seen her, but she had been ever present in his mind. He had hated coming into hospital, now he didn't care how long he stayed there.

"How ripping," he said, "meeting you again."
She interrupted him.

"Yes, I'm glad to see you. But you mustn't talk. Take the thermometer, please."

He obeyed, grumbling, and the temperature was duly recorded.

After the operation, she allowed him to speak while she smoothed his pillow and adjusted the bed-clothes.

She seemed as pleased as he was over the prospect of renewing their friendship, but she had to remind him that she was on duty, and couldn't stop to talk just then.

"Well, you haven't even shaken hands yet," he said in sulky tones.

She gave him her hand, and had some difficulty in releasing it. Then she hurried away to her other duties.

Aubrey was in for a really bad go of fever and did not shake it off for fifteen days, after which he was reduced to a shadow, and the doctor warned him that he would have a long period of convalescence.

During all these days he saw a great deal of Rose, but a nurse on duty cannot spend all her time at the bedside of one particular patient, and he found it very annoying that she always had to get away just as things were getting interesting. He thought of Beatrice but had no qualms of conscience. There's nothing wrong in a little harmless flirtation. Hang it all, that was part of their agreement, wasn't it ?

If Beatrice had known of his illness she would have been feeling very anxious, but one of the advantages that compensate us for the disadvantages of separation from those we love, is that we never know of these troubles until they are over. So there was nothing to damp her enjoyment of this beautiful July in Sonamarg.

The two soldiers had to be off about July 17th, and they intended to make the most of the short time left them.

On the first of the month they went off on a short shooting trip, returning five days later with the trophies of the chase—one black bear, and one panther.

The evening of their return was celebrated by a glorious camp fire round which they sat till late at night. Dick and John narrated various episodes in connection with their shikar, and the others told of their minor adventures in camp. To-morrow was to be a slack day and then there was to be a whole week of exploring. There was lots to be done in the short remaining time. They had not yet visited the second and third glaciers, and they wanted another ascent of Mount Sinai, a peak that stood out alone, and from which one got a magnificent panorama of the entire country.

Beatrice grudged the slack day; she was longing to resume the earlier programme of all-day picnics. Camp had been quiet—almost dull—since Dick and John had been away. It was delightful to have them back and sad to think that in ten days or so they would be gone. She had missed them very much.

Her train of thought continued after she had gone

to bed. It was true that *they* would soon be off and she had missed *them*. But she suddenly became aware that the use of the plural was a silly subterfuge. Can one hide oneself from oneself ? The plain fact was that John Cole would soon be off, and she had missed *him*.

It was no good wishing that it were not so. It just was so.

She thought of John Cole and the extraordinary way in which she had always seemed fated to meet him. Was it Destiny ?

Right away back in schoolgirl days she remembered him at the garden party when he had made a fuss over buying a flower at her stall. Then there was the incident of the punctured bicycle and his timely aid. The first meeting in Honeysuckle Lane when Peggy had introduced them. The days of the war work at the Vicarage when he had helped her to put things in order. Then that never-to-be-forgotten day when he had dared to tell her of his love. Then memories revived by his letter of apology. Then that glimpse of him at Lahore Station of which he knew nothing. Then his dramatic arrival here in camp. The happy picnic days, culminating in her humiliating rescue from the blue-poppy cliff. And now. She loved him. She was completely and absolutely in love with John Cole.

Then thank God that he was going.

And thank God that before this awful realisation came to her, he had cured himself of his love for her. There was no danger of any outbreak again in that direction. He was a sort of big brother to her. Never for one moment since his promise on the first day had he ever betrayed anything but a friendly interest in

her society. Even on the blue-poppy day when he held her stockinged feet in his hands, and almost held her in his arms as she slipped at the bottom of the cliff, he had been a model of good behaviour. As cold as ice.

There were only a few days left now and he would be gone for ever. He would never know of her love, and when he had gone she would cure herself without difficulty.

If he had not succeeded in mastering his feelings, how awful it might have been. To have had to admit that she loved him, and to turn Aubrey down. Dear old Aubrey, she loved him, but quite certainly not with the sort of love she now felt.

And she knew that his love, too, was not at all the same kind of love as John Cole's had been when he poured out his heart to her in that first passionate declaration. She liked to dwell on that. She recalled the beauty of the evening and the sight of John Cole coming towards her in his smart uniform. She had never admitted it to herself before, but it had really thrilled her.

Anyhow, even if John had continued to love her, and she had accepted his love in return, she would have remained true to Aubrey. As he himself said they had loved each other ever since they were kids—in a sort of way.

Yes, but in what sort of way ? Not this way, that was quite certain.

Well, John had set her a good example. She could not but believe that his love for her had been entirely genuine and sincere. Yet he had overcome it by sheer strength of will. If there was one thing that she was certain of as regards herself it was that

she had strength of will. So she could put it to the test. Another thought gave her additional strength. To realise that she loved such an entirely undesirable person as one of the Coles was bad enough. But to love a man who did not love you in return was utterly degrading.

She awoke in the morning bright and cheerful with the sort of feeling one has after a thunderstorm—a feeling of dull heavy pressure succeeded by incredible clearness and buoyancy.

She was glad she had had it out with herself. The struggle was over, and she felt calm and serene. Will-power had triumphed, and John Cole was now no more to her than any other man. To realise the power of one's will and to exert it, that was the secret of life. In this way one ceased to be the plaything of Destiny; one was master of one's own fate.

At breakfast-time she was unusually bright and sparkling. She no longer felt the necessity of being on her guard. For the next few days she would do exactly as she pleased, and things would be much more enjoyable now that she had no need to be perpetually thinking how to avoid being left alone with John.

On the following day they set off to explore No. 2 Glacier. The way lay first for two miles up the Tejwaz Valley where they crossed the stream by a snow bridge. They then picked their way over half a mile of boggy ground where the beautiful *primula rosea* was in flower, to the foot of the hill where the climb began. For the first thousand feet they passed through a dense forest of spruce. Then ascending above this they came to the region of birch trees.

Another thousand feet and they were among the rhododendrons. It was a little early yet for them to be in full blossom, but a few of the mauve and white varieties were bearing flowers. Then they passed above the tree-line on to the bare rock where climbing became harder work. They had lunch at about twelve thousand feet beside a small waterfall. Flowers grew in profusion here, mostly dwarf varieties of well-known species, primula, columbine and myosotis, but with that brilliant colouring that one only finds as the snow-line is approached. Another balance of nature. The harder conditions and the fiercer struggle to live, the more intense beauty.

After lunch Mr. Hughes and Gwendoline elected to take it easy, the other four continuing their climb up to the glacier. Dick led the way and the other three scrambled along independently. They got on to the glacier by two o'clock, and started to move across it, but the surface was very broken and rough, and crevasses were frequent, so Dick turned the party off the glacier on to the safer rocks on the east side. Then after a vain endeavour to reach the top of the ridge they commenced their descent. One does not talk very much on the upward climb, but coming easily down-hill conversation flows. John found himself scrambling along with Beatrice. She asked him about the frontier, and he amused her with stories of the wily Pathans. She also referred to last year's fighting, trying to draw him on the subject of his own experiences. But he was not to be drawn. As they talked he was wondering what had come over her. She seemed quite a different person to-day to the Beatrice of two days ago. It

was as if she had been freed from some irksome restraint.

They reached the tea place punctually, and after tea hurried home to escape a threatening storm.

The next day was spent in camp. It was a hot day, and after lunch everyone settled down to read, write, or doze.

John was not attracted by any of these occupations and proposed a quiet walk down to the bridge or anywhere else, but no one showed an inclination to join him. He appealed to Dick.

"Not for worlds, old boy," he replied, "leave me alone. I've had a large lunch. Now I want laziness and tobacco."

He issued a broadcast appeal.

"I hate a lonely walk and I hate sitting still doing nothing. I don't want to read, write or sleep. Come along one of you or all."

Beatrice shut her book and rose.

"This is a dull book and will send me to sleep," she said. "I don't want to sleep. I'll come if you promise not to make me late for tea. I wouldn't miss my tea for anything."

"Come along, Miss Mandersfield," he replied. "I'll guarantee to get you back by four."

And so they set off together—the two strong wills.

Beatrice felt it quite jolly to be alone with John, now that all that foolishness was over and they could be quite natural together.

They wandered across the marg to the entrance of the wooded ravine down which the small meadow stream fell to join the roaring torrent of the Sind river, five hundred feet below.

The sun was very hot and they were glad to get into the shade of the trees. There was a rough path on the left bank of the stream, but they chose the right bank, finding it more amusing to scramble down over the boulders and through the undergrowth. The path would provide a change on the return journey.

They reached the river and stood on the bridge for some little time to admire the tumbling and tossing of the jade waters. Then Beatrice began to hunt for new flowers—they nearly always got one or two new species every time they went out.

John crossed the bridge, and found an interesting plant with pink flowers in the rocks below Mount Sinai. Beatrice waved to him from the opposite bank. She had found something really exciting. He could not hear her voice above the roar of the waters but he gathered that his help was wanted.

When he reached her side she pointed over the edge of the rock she was leaning on to what looked like a small white primula right down at the water's edge. It could not be reached from above but John managed to get down on one side of the rock, and was just able to get at the plant by standing with one leg in the water and gripping the stem of a small bush with his spare hand.

Beatrice was delighted with her find. It turned out to be one of the rarest primulas, and the only one with a really sweet scent.

They commenced their return journey reluctantly, entering the ravine and climbing up by the path on the left bank of the stream. It was steep and slippery, and halfway up they stopped to rest. Beatrice seated herself on a moss-covered boulder

while John stretched himself at her feet. It was a beautiful spot. The stream fell from rock to rock in miniature cascades, sparkling like diamonds and emeralds in the narrow rays of sunlight that found their way through the canopy of leaves overhead. Ferns of many varieties displayed their delicate foliage in every cranny of the rocks, and the banks were clothed with pink balsam, wild sage with its grey-green foliage, and yellow violets.

"I could stay here for ever," Beatrice murmured. "What a sad thing life is, always moving on for ever and ever. My idea of heaven would be something like this, but with time standing still."

"Yes," John replied, "I think that's quite a nice idea of heaven. Rest and stability. It's exactly the opposite of my idea, but it's more likely to be right."

They talked of Hurstcombe. It seemed so far away—all that little village life—as if it were in another planet. Then Beatrice returned to the subject of the frontier and the Pathans. He tried to turn the conversation on to subjects concerning herself but she would not have it. It must have been terrible lying out there all night, she said.

"What were you thinking of, all the time?"

John turned and looking straight into her eyes replied :

"You."

"If you are going to be sentimental you will spoil everything," she said, turning her head away. "Remember your promise."

"Oh, I remember my promise well enough and I am not being sentimental. I just mentioned a fact. You asked a question and I had to answer it truthfully."

"Well, perhaps we'd better be getting on," she said, half rising from her seat.

"No, don't move on just yet. You will never in your life be in a more beautiful spot than this," he pleaded. "And I have something to say to you."

"Perhaps I would sooner not hear it."

"You can't tell that till I have spoken. But it would be unfair not to listen to me, and you're not the sort of person to be unfair."

"All right, go on, but remember your promise."

"What I want to say is this"—he rose and stood before her. "The first day of my arrival here you allowed me to speak my mind. Your kindness resulted in making my stay here possible. In a few days from now we shall be separated. I go back to Mesopotamia and we may never meet again. Before I go you must let me speak once again. I want you to understand that however much I loved you when I first spoke to you about it in Hurstcombe, I love you a thousand times more now—"

"Remember your promise."

"I do remember my promise and I smash it to smithereens. What have promises to do with love? Can one *promise* to love or not to love? Is love a paltry little thing to be confined to promises? And promises are only for mean natures. The meanness of a promise lies in the fact that every promise that was ever made can be evaded. I could keep my promise now and say to you: 'I will not tell you how I love you', and so on. And all the time, you see, I would be telling you and yet keeping my promise. I prefer to smash it—"

"Oh, stop, please."

" I will not stop. You asked me what I thought of as I lay wounded and waiting for death. I answer : ' You '. You may ask me what I think of day and night, what I have thought of day and night for years. I answer : ' You '. My love for you is the inspiration of my life. I may never win your love, yet in my mind you seem to be mine. My love may be hopeless, you may spurn it, but still you seem to be mine. It triumphs over hopelessness."

He came closer and stood within a pace of her. He was on lower ground and the rock on which she sat brought her just level with him.

He paused for a moment, breathing hard.

Beatrice was silent, looking down.

" Darling Beatrice. Mayn't I go on hoping ? "

Silence.

He took her two hands gently in his. She did not look up. She did not speak.

His voice sank to a whisper.

" My darling. Look up and say you love me."

She raised her head slowly and returned his gaze unflinchingly.

" I do love you. God knows I do, John. I have fought against it and struggled against it. But I can fight no longer."

In a moment his arms were round her, as he pressed his lips to hers.

There was a silence of some moments. Perhaps of many moments. A bird sang in the tree above, and the crystal stream tinkled at their feet like little silver bells. It was the great moment of life when the language of lips fails, and the unspoken language of the soul makes itself understood, raising poor mortals into the realms of the divine.

John was the first to break the silence.

"Sweetheart," he murmured.

He kissed her hands and released them, helping her to rise from her seat.

They wandered on and up, speaking rarely and slowly, like people coming out of a dream.

As they reached the top of the ravine John stopped and turned to her.

"Sit down again for a moment, darling. We can't go rushing into camp like this. We must talk over things quietly before we face the world."

They sat down and talked for half an hour. Beatrice told him, with tears in her eyes, of her situation as regarded Aubrey. They agreed to say nothing to anyone about the happenings of the afternoon. The situation was complicated and she must have time to see her way. It was very dreadful, and she felt guilty in her happiness. It was not a question of choosing whether she loved John or Aubrey best, because she knew now what real love was. And there was only one man in the world who could stir that emotion in her.

They sauntered across the meadows but as they neared camp they broke into a brisk and business-like step, arriving exactly at half-past five.

Gwendoline greeted them with ironical approval. "Quite nice young people, I must say. Promising to be back punctually at four. What on earth have you been doing ?"

"Oh, just mooning about," said Beatrice. "It was ripping down there and we didn't want to hurry home for tea. We found some new flowers. Just look at this primula. Isn't it a beauty ? And it smells like jasmine."

The remainder of the evening was spent chatting and playing bridge.

The next day there was a half-day picnic up the Gujars Hill, starting after lunch. John and Beatrice found lots of opportunities of being together and saying the sort of things that lovers say.

On the way home from the afternoon's picnic, they lagged behind. John would have liked to have sat down for an hour or two and risked the others' wrath, and the discovery of their secret, but Beatrice would not hear of it. If he wanted to talk love he must do it as they walked along.

"It is wonderful, darling," he said as they slowly descended the hill. "To think that only twenty-four hours have passed, since you first spoke those heavenly words. Now it all seems linked up with eternity. We belonged to each other always, and will belong for ever, in this world and the next."

"I wonder at myself, too," she answered, "when I look back on the past years and realise that I loved you most when I hated you most. I suppose I hated you for compelling my love against my reason."

He was astonished when she told him that he had stood within a few feet of her that night at Lahore railway station. Then he went on to speak of the future.

"It may seem rather rushing it. But when do you think we can be married ?"

"It certainly is rushing it. I had no such idea in my head."

"Silly darling. But we're going to be married, aren't we ? And I'm off in a day or two. And this war is going on for ever. My idea is that if there is no actual fighting going on I should get short Christ-

mas leave, and we could be married in Bombay. I don't know the rules about publishing the banns. There might be difficulty about that—”

“ Bother banns,” she interrupted. “ I have no intention of being married in a church. I don't feel at all in a hurry about it. But marriage by license is, I believe, an extraordinarily simple affair.”

“ But that isn't marriage, dear, to my mind.”

“ I'm sorry. But I think the church service is awful. Moreover, I have to say ‘ obey ’, and that I will never do. I love you frantically, and madly. Why, I do not know. Just because love is a sort of sweet madness, I suppose. And I shall probably always do what you ask me. But to promise to obey you is degrading, and I just will not do it.”

“ I wouldn't put you to the test. Many centuries have passed since Beaumanoir wrote: ‘ Every husband may beat a wife who will not obey him, provided that it be done in moderation, and not so as to result in death ’. I shall not ask you to obey me, so you have nothing to fear. Why worry over what is just a simple phrase ? ”

“ It's not a simple phrase. It's a good deal more. Besides I object to the whole service. Do you admire it, yourself ? ”

“ I can't say. I've never studied it.”

“ Well, read it through carefully to-night and tell me what you think of it to-morrow.”

John sat up late at night reading in his prayer-book “ The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony ”.

Love was a splendid thing. But matrimony seemed rather complicated.

CHAPTER XX

AS soon as they met next day, Beatrice invited John to give his opinion regarding the marriage service. But he refused to take up the controversy.

"Let's just be happy and enjoy ourselves," he said. "Can't you see how hungry I am for love, and nothing but love? I've been loving you in silence for five years; now I want to talk about it."

"Quite all right, then. Just give in, and we won't have to argue."

"Oh, but it's a really serious matter. I suppose I shall agree with you, but give me time. We don't leave till the seventeenth and, to-day is only the tenth, that's a whole week. Let's have a happy week and talk about it on the last day."

"We shan't have a whole week, alas! Gwen is taking me to Baltal, to see the Zoji Pass on the fifteenth. We are only staying the night and are coming back on the next afternoon. Mrs. Hughes is coming too, and we shall leave you three men to look after the camp here. It's a nuisance coming just now, but as the Hughes have to go down the same day you go, and she has never seen the Pass, it had to be fixed up for that day. So the fourteenth will be our last whole day together. You and Dick will be fussing about on the day you go, and we shan't see much of each other."

“ All right ; that gives us four happy love-days. Let us make the most of them.”

He had a sort of presentiment that this argument, begun in chaff, might be a rather difficult affair. He had never studied the marriage service, but he certainly had very strong ideas on the subject of holy matrimony. And it was quite likely that she had equally strong ideas. Still, if two people love each other whole-heartedly they can generally agree, and if there was any real trouble he could probably put his principles on one side and let her have her way.

The next four days were the best days of the year. glorious weather, beautiful country, and splendid walks. Beatrice and John managed to be a great deal together. They kept themselves under perfect restraint before the others, never betraying themselves by word or look, but Gwendoline could not help noticing the mere fact of their having been so much together these last few days.

She spoke to Beatrice about it.

“ Really, dear, you and that handsome young man seem to be running about together like a couple of lovers. I think Aubrey would be rather jealous if he were here.”

“ Nonsense,” Beatrice replied. “ Mr. Cole is only here for a few more days. I have got to like him very much, and it’s up to us to give the men as good a time as we can before they go back to the war. So I naturally let him trot around with me as much as he likes.”

Gwendoline had no suspicion of the real facts of the case. She had only spoken in fun. But still she thought that perhaps it was as well that John should be leaving in a few days.

July fourteenth was settled for a day in camp. They were taking tea out in the afternoon, but otherwise it was to be a lazy day.

Beatrice and John, by means of various subterfuges, were able to spend the whole morning together, meeting at a point they had previously fixed on in the woods above the camp. She found her way quietly in a direct line to the spot, while he, starting in the opposite direction, executed a wheel as soon as he was under cover, that brought him to the same spot a few minutes later.

It was some time before they referred to the matter in hand. John put off the evil moment, and hoped that a few minutes' talk would make everything right. But Beatrice was determined to get to the point without delay.

"Now then, John," she began, "let's talk business."

"Oh bother business," he replied, "let me just sit here and adore you."

"All right. There's nothing I'd like better. After all, there's nothing to argue about. I hate the idea of being married in a church. I will not promise to obey you. But I love you. Isn't that enough for you? Take me, John, and I'll be married in a registry office any day you like. Do you agree?"

"No."

"Then you don't love me."

"I do."

"If you loved me you'd do anything for me."

"So I would. Anything physical and material. Cut off my right hand if it were necessary. But mental and spiritual things one can't control in the same way."

" You can, if you love people."

" I think not."

" Well then, we've made a good start by totally disagreeing with each other."

" Perhaps we don't really disagree. Let's go into the matter, as it seems impossible to escape from it."

" This is quite like the village debating society," she said laughingly. " I've put my point of view before you ; now I'll listen to yours."

" Very well. I'll put it as shortly as I can. We'll stick to the debating society idea : let me have my say, and then you can sum it all up and give your decision."

" Go ahead. I'm listening."

" Good Lord, what a difficult thing it is," he said, as he moved round to face her. " I've been all through the marriage service and I admit I find it amazing. It may have been suitable for the days when nobody could read or write, and few could think. But it is incredible that it should have survived to insult us in this twentieth century. You probably have not read it yourself as carefully as you might have done. Otherwise you would not have stumbled over that word 'obey,' when there are much bigger matters you might object to more reasonably. If I were a woman I would make a greater fuss about being 'given away.' I might maintain that no one, not even a parent, had the power to 'give me away.' Women are no longer regarded as property. Then I should have something to say about 'with all my worldly goods I thee endow ; I should like to get some of those worldly goods and would not allow myself to be put off with two hundred pounds a year pin-money

when I married a man with an income of ten thousand a year. Then I agree it is a dreadful thing to promise to love, as we both have to do. One either loves or does not love ; love is not affected by promises. You might as well promise to be always in good health, or to do any other thing that was admittedly beyond your control."

" Good. Then you agree with me."

" No. I'm afraid I don't. We've only been discussing the actual words of the ritual, and on that point we agree. But ritual is the cloak, not the thing itself. One allows oneself to criticise the wording of these mediæval ceremonies, and I dare say one is wrong even to do that. Still, it is the way of the age we live in. But the essence of the ceremony lies not at all in the words used by the priest, but in one's humble recognition of God, and the holiness of the marriage bond. Whatever words are used, marriage is to me a sacred affair. And marriage not solemnised at God's altar is no marriage at all."

" Really, John, you terrify me with your serious way of looking at it. I don't feel that way about it. The state tells me I'm all right if I get a license. Is the state wrong ? "

" No. I suppose the state has to say that to meet the cases of people who have no religion."

The argument began to get fierce, when John called a truce.

" Look here, darling. We're exciting ourselves too much. You'll be getting quite cross in a minute. Lets drop the subject now, and talk of pleasanter things. It will soon be time to be getting back to camp."

In the afternoon, after tea, they renewed the discussion.

"Well, John," said Beatrice. "it's for you to take me or leave me."

"I'll take you, thanks."

"And you won't insist on the church ceremony, and making me promise to obey ?"

"I can't insist, darling. But we could be married in no other way."

Beatrice could control herself no longer.

"And this is what you call love, is it ? Refusing to give in over the very first thing I ask you."

"Darling, if I consulted my love alone, I'd give in to anything. But there are"

"Oh, you and your psalm-singing. I hate all that sort of priggish stuff," she interrupted. "It's just as well we had this out. I was a fool to think I could ever be happy with such a goody-goody young emblem of virtue."

"You're rather hard on me. I am what I am. Religion has never been a joke or a trifle or a bore to me. I'm sorry. I really don't believe I'm either priggish or goody-goody, and it's unkind of you to hurl those epithets at me.

"But, darling," he added, "let's pull ourselves together. Is this tragedy or comedy ? It's tragic enough to me, but anyone looking on would regard it as comedy for two people loving each other as we do, to start quarrelling over the marriage service in the first week of their love-making."

"Now you think it comic, do you ?" she said furiously. "I am comic, and I am quarrelling. Thank you."

She moved away from him in the direction of camp and he made as if to follow her.

"No, leave me alone, please. I am going home and don't need your company."

"But darling—"

"Oh, don't call me 'darling' any more. I hate you."

He remained standing watching her figure receding in the distance. He could not analyse his sensations and did not try to. He just felt miserable, unhappy, and helpless.

Beatrice walked into camp just as the evening post arrived. She took her letters with her up to her tent. She had one from Aubrey, and one from Mrs. Carford.

She read Aubrey's letter first. It was not very long but it was important. He wrote about their engagement. "Mother has been writing and bothering again, so I think we had better give in. Besides I suppose we shall soon be married. I am promised leave in December, if there's no excitement on this front, and you are expected home about then. So we could be fixed up before Christmas. How do you like the idea of being Mrs. Aubrey? You will make a jolly little wife and I hope I shall make a decent husband. Let me know if you agree and I'll tell mother to have it given out. She'll be frightfully pleased."

Mrs. Carford wrote a letter full of general village news and asking some questions about last year's war work. She was having a leaflet printed giving details up-to-date, and there were one or two things that she could not quite remember, or find out from the books.

There was an hour before dinner, and Beatrice sat thinking over her quarrel with John and her letter from Aubrey. Her mind was torn in two. She was miserable over having quarrelled, and would have liked to make it up. She loved John and could never love anyone else. But to be insulted and derided. To be told she was quarrelsome and comic ! And what was his love worth if he couldn't grant her her very first request ? No, she hated him. She had never really loved him. He had just hypnotised her. Thank God it was all off now. How could she have broken it to dear old Aubrey ? It would have been a wicked and disloyal thing to do. Now she was saved from this dilemma. She would write at once. She sat down at her table and wrote a short letter telling Aubrey that she quite agreed, and would like the engagement given out at once, and she hoped they would be married in December. She reminded him of what she had said before about a church marriage. It would shock her people and his, but she did not care twopence. She was not going to say "obey" to any man. And she knew he wouldn't mind, either. Sensible men were always glad to escape the tedious ceremony.

She fastened up her letter and ran across to the dining-room tent to put it in the letter-bag that was taken to the post every evening after dinner. She felt certain that she would never change her mind, but it was best to put the chance of doing so beyond her reach.

At dinner and for the remainder of the evening John had no opportunity of speaking to her except in so far as they both took part in the general conversation. It was very exasperating for him but

there was nothing to be done except hope for a chance to-morrow.

The next morning they made an early start for Baltal. John was up and about an hour before breakfast, seeking an opportunity to have a word with Beatrice. It was difficult, but he managed it at last.

He did not know exactly what to say, but he murmured something about thinking it over and making it up.

"We really are two silly things," he said, "to quarrel over the manner of being married."

"That is not what we quarrelled over," she replied angrily.

"What was it, then ?"

"We did not quarrel at all. It takes two to make a quarrel, and I was no party to it. I was angry with you, and honestly, I hate you, for one thing only. I asked you to do something for me, and you flatly refused. That settles it. That's not my idea of love."

He could make no answer, as Gwendoline called out that the ponies were ready, and a few minutes later the party set off.

John was perplexed and miserable. To his mind it was an awful thing not to regard marriage as a sacred thing. To make it a purely civil contract was to degrade it. Still, love is stronger than anything, stronger than death, perhaps stronger than principles. He must think it over and try to bring himself to accept her terms when she came back to-morrow. He could not bear the thought of losing her.

At lunch time he got a wire from the embarkation

officer at Karachi telling him that his ship for Basra was to leave on the twentieth instead of the twenty-second. He showed it to Dick.

“Bad luck, old man,” said Dick. “You’ll only just do it if you get off at daybreak to-morrow. I’ll fix up for ponies for you at once and you’d better send your kit on to-night. Gwen will be awfully sorry not to see you to say good-bye. I’ve got another week because they want me to take charge of a party of sappers leaving by the next boat. I wish we could have gone together.”

Well. So this was the end of it all. To love her, to quarrel, to leave her without saying good-bye, all within the space of a week. What a week ! And now, perhaps, never to see her again.

He wrote her a long letter and put it in her tent, and at daybreak the next morning started to ride down the valley.

Beatrice would have enjoyed the trip to Baltal and the Zoji Pass, but she could not keep her thoughts away from the subject of yesterday’s catastrophe. When they returned to Sonamarg she would only have one more day of John’s society. She would try to be nice to him on his last day. But she would have to tell him about Aubrey and her engagement, and that would not be very nice for him. Poor John. She felt sorry for him. He seemed to be always up against something, and now she had brought this tragedy into his life.

They rode into camp next day in time for tea, and Dick told them about John’s telegram and sudden departure. Gwendoline was really distressed about it. She was sorry not to have seen him to say good-bye. She liked him very much.

"It was really clever of you, Dick," she said, "to have picked out such a good fellow for a pal. I shall miss him very much."

She spoke to Beatrice about him when they were alone.

"I expect he was pretty sick at having to go off without saying good-bye to you."

"Oh, I don't think that would weigh on his mind very much."

"You don't seem to mind very much, either."

"Not in the least. One gets accustomed to people coming and going."

"But I really thought at one time you and he seemed to be rather drawing together—so to speak."

"What an idea, Gwen! Why, I only wrote the night before last to Aubrey that our engagement could be given out."

"Oh, I am glad, dear. Then I can tell everyone. It's really settled, is it ?"

"Yes, quite. I got a letter from Aubrey the night before we left, asking me if I agreed. I just had time to answer it."

"So you're really going to be one of the family now. I am most awfully pleased."

They went off to unpack their kit and bathe and dress for dinner.

Beatrice half expected to find a note from John in her tent. She was relieved to find there was none. It was very decent of him to drop the matter altogether. Still, if he *had* left a line just to say good-bye, she could hardly have blamed him.

It was rather a quiet dinner. They were tired and no one proposed even a rubber of bridge. Early

bed suggested itself to all of them, and they broke up soon after the meal.

Beatrice undressed and was just thinking about getting into bed when her eyes fell on John's letter. It was lying on the quilt on her bed and she had not noticed it when she came in to unpack and change.

She picked it up and turned it over. Should she tear it up unread ? No, what nonsense. She might just as well read it. But not now. In the morning, perhaps.

She got into bed and put out the light. Suddenly, in the darkness, her mind became extremely clear. It was as if some evil spirit had possessed her for the last two days and had now been exorcised.

What had she done ?

Thrown away the priceless gift of real love, in a fit of foolish temper. And worse still, had promised to marry a man for whom she had no love—as she knew at last what love was. Love was what she had felt and was still feeling for John Cole, and could never feel for any other man. What a tremendous thing it was—overpowering, inexpressible, beautiful

She changed her mind about his letter. She would read it now. She lit a candle and tore open the envelope. It was long, and it contained no reproaches, only love—the passionate outpouring of a tortured soul. Poor John, how he loved her. Now she must write and tell him it was finally and irrevocably finished, she had promised to marry Aubrey, and they must never meet again.

In the morning she wrote briefly to John telling him of her engagement to Aubrey.

Then she answered Mrs. Carford's letter. She was possessed with a longing to tell her troubles to some-

one. She could not tell Gwendoline, because she was Aubrey's sister. She could not possibly tell it to her mother. She would have liked to have written to her godfather, but he was a man; he could never understand. So she unburdened herself to Mrs. Carford in the form of asking for advice. "I love John Cole, and no one else, and I can never love anyone else. But I have always been pledged to marry Aubrey and I am going to do so. If I marry him, I marry one man while I love another. If I do not marry him, I break a solemn pledge. Surely you cannot advise me to do the latter, so I hope you'll write and tell me that you agree with me."

John got his letter very soon after he rejoined his regiment. He answered in two lines. "You have done a very wicked thing. My love will never alter."

CHAPTER XXI

BEATRICE'S letter reached Aubrey on August the first.

July had been a wonderful month for him. He had spent every hour that he possibly could spend in Rose's society, and now, too late, had discovered that he was absolutely infatuated with her. And as far as Rose was concerned, she knew that she had at last met the man she could love.

But with all his love, Aubrey had at present no idea of marrying Rose. How on earth could he, when he was going to marry Beatrice? He wished he had never sent that letter about the engagement. What a fool he had been!

Whatever happened, it seemed impossible to break his promise to Beatrice. He loved her very much, but not at all as he did Rose, and he hated the idea of causing her pain, and then the upset with his people, and everything. No, he must stick to Beatrice.

Yet while he talked like this to himself, he found it more and more impossible to contemplate life without Rose. He must marry Rose. Good heavens, what a tangle!

He had found out that Rose was a widow, but until now he had never asked for details of her family. When she told him all about herself, her people, and her marriage, he was horrified and bewildered. Rose

Garstin was not Rose Garstin at all, but Rose Cole, the widow of that appalling creature, Percy Cole ! Such a marriage would be a degradation. He determined to cut the whole thing.

He failed to keep an appointment he had with her, and stayed away a whole day with the intention of getting a few days' leave, and writing her a letter breaking off the affair. But at the end of twenty-four hours he found himself hurrying back to her to ask forgiveness.

He had had so many love affairs before now and had never failed to extricate himself. When he made love to Rose he never meant it to be serious, and his love-making was not at all connected with the idea of matrimony. But Rose assumed that from the start and declined to be drawn into any sort of mere flirtation, or temporary affair of passion.

Things were brought to a head by the notification of her transfer in a month's time to Egypt.

After a fierce struggle with himself, Aubrey just had to admit that he could not live without Rose.

All the trained part of his character fought fiercely to save him from the double calamity of a *mésalliance*, and the breaking of his word to Beatrice. But nature triumphed, scattering the artificial defences of inherited prejudice like chaff before the wind. Rose must be his, whatever happened. Putting on one side what he considered her lack of birth and breeding, she was not only the most beautiful and adorable creature in the world, but she was a queen among women, clever and refined, and fit to take her place in any society.

It was difficult to write to Beatrice about it, but it had to be done, and the sooner the better.

Beatrice was still in Sonamarg with Gwendoline. Dick and the Hughes had gone down the valley soon after John's departure, and Gwendoline decided to stay on in camp. But she was pining for a sight of her boy whom she had not seen for two months. She had good news of him from the Williamsons who were looking after him. She invited them to come up and bring Richard with them, and they arrived in camp at the end of July.

They were a very happy party now, with just the four of them, and Richard and his nurse. But the days were very different to those unforgettable days of June and early July. Gwendoline missed Dick very much, and war-time is an anxious time for wives. Beatrice missed John, too, but she never framed that word in her mind ; it was too little. She just felt that life had gone out of her. While John was there she had revelled in her love, but had not realised its force. Now that they were for ever parted, its strength amazed her. Every tree and rock on the path down to the ravine seemed to breathe his presence and call out his love for her.

And this great passion she had deliberately cast out of her life. Now she was to debase herself by marrying a man she did not love, and whom, in a loveless marriage she would probably learn to hate. Well, whatever her fate was, she could not rail against it, as no human being could ever have had a better chance of controlling their own destiny.

She tortured herself, as all true lovers do, by

recalling to her mind every scene of her ruined happiness. The blue-poppy day, the proposal day, the four days of perfect bliss, and the fatal, foolish quarrel day.

On every possible occasion she wandered by herself down to the bridge by the path in the ravine. She hung over the rock on the river bank and saw the little primula there. It had put out some fresh blossoms. The eternal river tumbled noisily over the grey boulders. Nothing had changed but herself. Then she paused halfway up the ravine by the mossy rock where she had sat when John had so bravely broken his promise and poured out his love to her, revealing her own love to herself. She remembered every word of his passionate appeal ; it rang like sad but noble music in her heart. She recalled Aubrey's love-making : " Of course we love each other, don't we ? Always have," and so on. What desecration !

Early in September the post brought Aubrey's letter from Salonika. Gwendoline and she were sitting together in the dining-room tent after tea, when the letters were delivered.

Beatrice opened Aubrey's letter and began to read it.

Suddenly she dropped it on her lap and burst into a flood of tears.

Gwendoline was astounded. What an entirely new phase of Beatrice's character. She was always so clear-headed, strong-minded, and under control.

" Beatrice, my dear, what is the matter ? " she said in horror-stricken tones. " Is Aubrey dead or wounded ? "

"Nothing is the matter, Gwen," she replied. "I'm awfully sorry to make such a fool of myself. Aubrey is quite well and happy and he doesn't want to marry me."

"What do you mean ?"

"I mean just that."

"Goodness ! Poor Beatrice. I'm frightfully sorry. How could Aubrey do such a dreadful thing? "

"Please don't talk about it. I'm going to my tent. I know your kind heart will suggest your coming to comfort me, but I want to be quite alone. If I don't turn up to dinner, make my excuses, but please do not come near me."

She went off to her tent, where she threw herself on the bed, burying her face in the pillow and banishing all control to the four winds.

Her mind was in a chaotic state ; she could not unravel her thoughts ; she could not even think. She could only cry.

She lay like that till it was dark. She had sunk into a sort of doze when she heard Gwendoline's voice outside the tent.

"Beatrice, darling, please let me come in a moment, won't you ? We've had dinner and I want to get you something to eat."

"Yes, come in, Gwen."

She came in and sat beside the bed, taking Beatrice's hand in hers.

"I don't want to bother you about your troubles just now. I only want to know if I can get you some food."

"No, thanks. I should choke if I tried to eat. I'm awfully sorry to have let myself go like that. I'm not that sort of person, as you know. I've been

crying for two hours, and I hardly knew before that I could cry. I'm all right now, and you can talk as much as you like."

Gwendoline was dying to say anything she could think of to comfort Beatrice. She spoke angrily of Aubrey's disgraceful behaviour. Beatrice let her run on, then suddenly she interrupted.

"It's good and kind of you, Gwen, to come and try to cheer me up, but you're misunderstanding the whole situation. I'm going to make a terrible confession to you. First of all, I never loved Aubrey and I am intensely happy to be released from my engagement. But I know something about love, and even if I had loved Aubrey, I would not have held him to me by any trumpery pledges if I knew he preferred any other woman to me. To marry anyone merely because you are pledged to them seems to me to be utterly foolish and wicked. Love cannot be guided by pledges, and love is the only thing that matters."

Gwendoline was astonished at Beatrice's announcement that she had never loved Aubrey.

"I *thought* I did, Gwen dear," she said in reply to her remonstrances, "but I was like many other people. I did not know what love was."

"And do you, now ?"

"I do."

"Frankly, I don't understand you."

"I love John Cole," she said in a whisper. "Please never say a word about it. Good-night, Gwen dear. It was good of you to come and see me. I shall be able to sleep now that I have told someone. I'll undress and turn in, and to-morrow I'll tell you all about it."

The next morning she took Gwendoline off into the woods after breakfast and told her the story of her love for John Cole. It was a relief to unburden herself.

"But if you didn't love Aubrey," said Gwendoline when Beatrice had told her all, "I can't understand your breaking down in that way when you got his letter releasing you."

"I can't understand myself," she replied. "At least not in the way that would enable me to explain it to any other person. Words never express our deepest thoughts and moods, do they? The tears just came, and I was glad they came."

She made Gwendoline promise again never to say a word about it to anyone.

When Gwendoline had gone her mind returned to her bitter reflections. Aubrey's letter had solved all her difficulties.

She had had a miraculous escape from a dreadful entanglement, but before her chance of escape came she had thrown away the love of the only man she loved. Now, come what might, she could never marry John Cole. If he knew of what had happened, he would fly to her and try to renew their relations. He would ask her to marry him, and she would say "Yes." They would be married, and their love would always be tainted. He might never think, "she jumped at me when she had lost the other," but she could never cease to fear that he thought it. She was to pose as a slighted woman who had accepted him *faute de mieux*.

Impossible !

One can seldom allow oneself to yield to one's strongest impulses. Beatrice had only one impulse :

To find out John and say to him, "Darling, the clouds have rolled away. I love you. Take me unconditionally." That would be a splendid thing to do, but impossible. It even had about it a touch of the ridiculous, so fine is the dividing line between pathos and bathos.

Towards the end of the month it was turning cold in the camp at ten thousand feet, and they decided to return to Srinagar.

Beatrice found the last days filled with a sweet sadness. Autumn has a beauty of its own, though it is suggestive of melancholy. The happy summer days of golden sunshine had gone for ever. Other summer days would come, but not those ones. The beautiful flowers that adorned the meadows had gone to seed or been crushed and trampled beneath the feet of grazing cattle. Snow would soon be falling on the higher ranges. The trees were already beginning to lose their leaves.

She revisited each hallowed spot for the last time, bidding farewell to the spirits that haunted them. On the very last day she lingered in the ravine by the scene of John's avowal, till the last rays of the setting sun had gone, then wandered home in the deepening twilight. She had never been given to tears, but since the flood of weeping that had taken her by surprise when she read Aubrey's letter, they came readily to her eyes. They fell now unrestrained as she realised the finality of her farewells. It was good-bye to the inanimate things that reminded her of her love, and it was good-bye for ever to the love itself.

John was eating his heart out in Mesopotamia. It

was bad enough not to be able to see and speak to Beatrice, but the announcement of her engagement to Aubrey debarred him from even the small pleasure of writing to her. He wrote twice to Gwendoline, however. A short letter of thanks before sailing from Karachi, and an interesting letter from Baghdad a month later. He had not met Dick, who had been posted to a unit in Basrah.

Beatrice's letter had been a staggering blow. But it did not tend in the slightest degree to lessen his love for her. There was no hope at all for him, yet he refused to be hopeless. Beatrice and he belonged to each other, and must come together in the end. How, it was no use trying to think, but it must be so.

On October 30th the Armistice was signed between the Entente Powers and Turkey, and twelve days later, the final Armistice with Germany which ended the Great War.

Life in the army became hopelessly dull after four years of active service, and everyone grumbled at the long delay that must ensue before demobilisation was complete.

John was not one of the lucky ones to get off in the early days, but he did not mind. If things were dull in Mesopotamia, they would be even duller in England as far as he was concerned. There would undoubtedly be a lot of jollification and liberal spending of money, but nothing counted without Beatrice, and with her near at hand she would seem further off than ever. He would sooner stay in Mesopotamia the rest of his life than run the risk of meeting her as Mrs. Aubrey Campbell. When she had told him of her intention to marry Aubrey, he had written

reproaching her for doing a very wicked thing—marrying one man while loving another. And it was a wicked thing, too, as far as he was concerned, because the fact of her being married made no difference to his love for her. He would never seek her out, probably never meet her. But he would never cease to love her. You cannot turn off love like turning off a tap. He loved her for ever, married or not.

In January of the next year he heard that she had been married. So that was settled.

It was just casually mentioned in a letter from Hurstcombe. Something about Mr. Aubrey Campbell being expected home with his bride.

John had gathered from her last letter that Beatrice would be married to Aubrey as soon as the wedding could possibly be arranged. So there was nothing to be surprised at when he heard her spoken of as Aubrey's bride.

But his self-control broke down at last. He felt as if he should go mad. Beatrice was so entirely his, that the thought of her being married to another filled him with horror and almost with despair. Almost, but not quite.

For a few days he suffered tortures. Then his optimistic nature revived. He had always hoped when things were most hopeless, and now that there was no hope at all, hope survived. There was no logic in it, but there never is any logic in the best things of life. Logic is a deadly thing.

Beatrice sailed from India in January and reached Hurstcombe a month later.

Mrs. Mandersfield had left Highfields and had re-opened Upton Green.

Major Tom Robertson came to meet her at the station and drive her home.

"You've only been a year away," he said as they began to talk after the first greetings, "but you look quite another person. More beautiful than ever but quite different."

"Don't flatter me, please," she replied smiling.

"No flattery at all, and godfathers are privileged to say what they like," he answered.

He referred to Aubrey, but she stopped him.

"Please don't talk about that. I am glad that things are as they are. We never really loved each other."

Mrs. Mandersfield was at the door to welcome her. She put her arms round Beatrice and kissed her, then stood at arms' length to have a good look at her.

"Really, Beatrice darling, it's delightful to have you home again. But how you've altered. Your complexion is all to pieces. I wish I had never let you go to India."

"Oh, mother dear, please don't be too critical. Major Robertson has been saying the same sort of thing to me. I think it's very unkind."

"No, dear, don't think I mean to be unkind. I'm just overjoyed to have you back, but you must forgive me, I only meant that you looked so very Indian."

"Not black, am I ?"

"No, but your clothes are so peculiar, and you have altogether a rather odd look about you."

"Well, darling mother, I've been living all this time in places where clothes are not the first consideration. In rather odd places, in fact, so don't mind if I *look* odd."

She felt a little chilled by her reception but she knew it was kindly meant. Merely a mother's desire to see her children in every sense "up to the mark."

She was tired of having the question of Aubrey and the broken engagement brought up over and over again, but she felt that she just had to go through with it.

Mrs. Mandersfield was shocked when she said that she had never loved Aubrey and was glad to be out of it. She thought this was probably due to pique, and felt very sorry for her.

Beatrice spent the next few days going round the village looking up old friends.

Aubrey was to be demobilised in March and was bringing his bride home with him to Highfields. Sir Clarence and Lady Campbell regarded the whole thing as a tragedy. They were very fond of Beatrice and had always hoped to welcome her as a daughter-in-law. Now Aubrey had contracted this dreadful *mésalliance*. One of those abominable "war weddings." Beatrice never varied in her replies to such commiserations. But Lady Campbell smiled the smile of unbelief when she said that she and Aubrey had never loved each other, and that she was sure he had chosen the right person. They could not understand her mood. Mrs. Carford was the only one who could.

Aubrey came home in March, and he met Beatrice a few days after his arrival. He had dreaded meeting her and having explanations, but he was delighted to find it quite an easy affair. He even felt rather hurt as he realised that her congratulations on his marriage to Rose were quite sincere. It was a polite way of

saying she thanked goodness *she* had never married him. He also could not understand her mood.

She met Rose and liked her very much. She was beautiful and charming and obviously in love with her husband. It was a peculiar coincidence that Aubrey should have married the widow of Percy Cole. The very man that was the cause of the insulting nickname "The Bounder," wrongly applied to John. It was nice to know that Rose had been left quite well off and was not likely to have married Aubrey for his money.

Sinclair came home in the following month, and was to marry Peggy in September. He was quite the bronzed warrior, and crowed over Aubrey in the matter of war experiences. The cavalry had come into their own in Palestine. He had been all through with Allenby in 1917 and 1918 and had escaped without wounds or sickness.

Beatrice met Mr. Cole and Emily on several occasions. The social ban on Fir Grove had been removed. Now that Aubrey had married Percy Cole's widow, Lady Campbell felt that it would be absurd to continue holding the Cole family at arms' length.

Major Robertson had many long talks with Beatrice about her life in India and Kashmir. He was interested to know that she had seen so much of John Cole out there, and she had no hesitation in admitting that she liked him very much.

He spoke of the social changes that the war had brought about. He liked some and disliked others. It was good that people should be more natural and that there should be some relaxation of the old rigid code. But things might go too far; the pendulum

would never stay in the middle. The top-hat and frock-coat had almost entirely vanished—he didn't quite like that. And he did not like the changes in the young people. The sexes seemed to have swapped round as regards their manner of wearing their hair. The girls bobbed theirs, and the young men let theirs grow as long as a girl's. It had become the custom for men to wear Burberrys or old trench-coats in mufti. He didn't mind that if they were clean, but apparently the idea was to wear them as dirty as possible.

He was really very glad that the Cole family had at last been "accepted." He had always liked John, and latterly had got to know old Mr. Cole very well and admired his sterling qualities.

Mr. Cole wrote to John telling him among other things of Aubrey's marriage to Percy's widow.

CHAPTER XXII

THE news that Aubrey had married Rose, and that Beatrice was not married filled John's mind with ecstatic happiness.

Now the field was clear for a renewal of the struggle. Like a good soldier he summed up the situation, enumerating the difficulties that lay between him and his goal.

First and foremost, Beatrice might fall in love with someone else. This he dismissed as either impossible, or if possible, then not to be contended with.

Next, there remained the original cause of their quarrel. That still remained difficult but not insuperable.

Then, having been jilted by Aubrey, her proud nature might revolt against yielding to a lover whom she had formerly rejected. It put her in a difficult position.

What a hopeless idiot Aubrey Campbell must be—thank God he was.

He wanted to write to her now that writing was again possible. But writing was hateful; it might do more harm than good. He could not write just now. The whole difficulty lay in the fact that they had parted after a quarrel with no opportunity of reconciliation. It was not easy to pick up the broken threads by means of letter-writing.

If he could only see her. But there was no chance of that. No leave, and no prospect of demobilisation till next year.

A month later he made up his mind to write.

He intended his letter to be very short, just a setting forth of the facts, a declaration of his unaltered love, and a simple solution of their difficulties. But his pen ran away with him and he wrote several pages, dwelling on the happy memories of Sonamarg.

He got her reply in August. It certainly was brief enough. She would never love anyone else, but their love affair was none the less definitely finished. She had tried to put the thoughts of it out of her mind, and would succeed. In any case the idea of their marriage had now become, for certain reasons, quite beyond consideration. Would he please not write any more.

It looked a rather disappointing letter, but it filled him with a sense of triumph. She loved him still. That was all he wanted to know; nothing else mattered. Their love affair was not definitely finished but was leading on to a glorious fulfilment. She would not succeed in putting the thoughts of it out of her mind. Oh, if he could only get home for one day !

He wrote again at Christmas but got no reply.

At last the regiment got orders for home. They were to leave in March and would be in England in April.

He counted the days and hours until the happy day arrived when they embarked on the transport for the home journey. He sent a cable to his father telling him the probable date of their arrival.

Mr. Cole received the news on a Saturday, and

passed it on to his neighbours during the period of friendly greetings after morning service on Sunday.

When Beatrice heard of it she wondered what it would be best for her to do.

During all the time since she had last seen John, she had been putting her strength of will to the test. She loved him, but love between them had turned into a contest, and she refused to accept defeat. She would never marry him now, and so she must eradicate this love. She remembered that she had tried her will-power before in Kashmir and it had failed her. But John had been there, and her will had not had a fair chance.

It really was not such a difficult affair. One had only to keep on asserting, over and over again, "I do not love him." The method was succeeding splendidly. She found her love diminishing day by day. She might by now have almost forgotten it, but the cure refused to go beyond a certain point.

To start each day by saying "I do not love him," entailed the necessity of considering the matter of her love for him. The method that was curing her was also keeping her love alive by reminding her of it. Perhaps after all the cure was not going to be so efficacious. She had better try some other means.

Then had come John's first letter from Mesopotamia, and for a time her defences entirely broke down. For twenty-four hours she revelled in an abandonment to her love, which, to her amazement, seemed stronger than ever. Then she tried her strength of will again. She could not believe that it would fail her, but she felt it was driving her mad.

Mrs. Mandersfield wondered what was the matter with her, her moods were so extraordinary. She

was evidently suffering from Aubrey's treachery. What a brute he had been. All that talk of hers about not minding and not having ever loved Aubrey was of course a subterfuge of wounded pride.

There was only one thing to be done. To get her away from Hurstcombe, and to take her to London or anywhere where she could get distraction and meet eligible young men. Broken hearts can always be mended.

But Beatrice obstinately refused to fall in with her mother's ideas.

Now this news of John Cole's return to Hurstcombe compelled her to do something. It would be dreadful to meet him here. She simply could not face it.

Lying awake at night thinking over means of escape, a brilliant idea occurred to her. Aubrey and Rose had just returned from a trip to Belgium where they had been to see the battlefields. They had had a splendid time, and were full of admiration for the wonderful old mediæval cities of Belgium. Living in Bruges had been like living right away back in the Middle Ages. Beatrice had been fascinated at Rose's description of everything.

Now it was easy to make up her mind—she would go to Belgium. A month or two there would give her a chance to think over things, and by the time she returned she would have new plans. She might fall in with her mother's idea of going to London, or anywhere else that would keep her away from Hurstcombe.

She heard from Mr. Cole that John was expected about the end of April, so she put her scheme before her mother in the beginning of the month.

Mrs. Mandersfield was quite taken with the idea.

She had always wanted to see Antwerp and Brussels and Bruges and the other famous old cities of Belgium.

Beatrice however, had no idea of going with her mother. She wanted to be quite free.

"I'm sorry, mother dear," she said, "but I want to go alone."

"Go alone, Beatrice ? What a mad idea !"

"I don't think it is very mad. In any case, I do really mean it."

"But I could never allow it. Who ever heard of a young girl trotting about the Continent by herself."

"Oh, times are quite changed in that respect. Lots of young girls do it frequently. And I am not a young girl."

Mrs. Mandersfield got quite angry about it, saying finally that she forbade it.

"I don't want to seem undutiful," said Beatrice closing the argument, "and I hate the idea of doing anything you don't like. But really mother, you must let me decide this for myself. I was twenty-two last September, and I must be allowed to have a mind of my own."

Mrs. Mandersfield gave in in the end, but was very vexed about it.

Beatrice left for Bruges ten days later. She had written for rooms in a *pension* but had had no reply, so she asked her mother to address her letters *poste restante*. She would write as soon as possible and let her know what accommodation she had found.

As soon as she arrived at Bruges she sent off a post-card letting her know that she had had a good crossing and altogether a pleasant, easy journey.

She wrote the post-card in pencil and posted it at

the station so as to have that duty off her mind. Then she took a taxi to the address to which she had written, but found they had not received her letter and had no rooms vacant. She drove on to another *pension* in the Rue Longue where she found what she wanted, a nice room on the first floor looking over a large garden.

She unpacked her things, and went to bed early, after a light dinner.

Next morning she awoke with a feeling of exhilaration. The change had already begun to work, she would be able to forget everything in the joys of sight-seeing.

The *pension* was beautifully situated, being built on the site of an old monastery. It had no front on the road but lay behind the main buildings. You passed through a large archway from the main street and found yourself in a large fruit garden in the midst of which stood the building.

Here everything was as quiet as if you were out in the middle of the country. She soon found that this was an especial advantage in Bruges where the noise of the traffic was worse than anything she had ever encountered. Large country carts rattling and crashing over the rough stone-paved streets, noisy electric trams sounding ear-piercing gongs, motor-cars passing each other in the narrow streets, shrieking warnings in every variety of infernal sounds, large dogs drawing small carts seeking relaxation when halted in barking defiance at each other.

The noise was literally terrifying, but in the *pension* garden hardly a sound could be heard.

She spent each day visiting old churches, and art galleries, and began to acquire a taste for the Old

Masters. The pictures of Hans Memling and the brothers Van Eyck were incredibly beautiful. She wondered if the art of painting had really progressed since their days.

On the first Monday in May was the Procession of the Holy Blood. A sacred relic of a drop of our Saviour's blood brought back from Palestine, in 1149, by the Count of Flanders, Thierry d'Alsace.

The town was filled with pilgrims from all parts of Western Europe, and thronged with peasants from the neighbouring villages. One could hardly move in the streets.

The manager of the *pension* managed to get her a seat in a window in the Rue Haute down which the procession passed.

She thought she had never seen anything so beautiful and inspiring. Apart from the question of the authenticity of the sacred relic which she entirely doubted, the pageant seemed to bring out all the beauty of religious faith, to put religion—in its broadest sense—in a new light before her.

The various groups in Eastern costume representing scenes in the life of the Saviour, from the birth at Bethlehem to the Cross on Calvary, others dealing with the lives of the Saints, were wonderfully contrived and strikingly realistic.

The whole procession took nearly an hour to pass and as the troop of cavalry bringing up the rear moved out of sight, the dense crowd surged from the pavements into the street, blocking it completely from wall to wall. They were a picturesque collection of peasant types. It was interesting watching them.

Suddenly among the crowd of faces she caught

sight of one, half lifted up in her direction. She held her breath and her heart stopped beating. It was John Cole.

John had reached Hurstcombe at the end of April. Travelling down from London his mind was filled with thoughts of Beatrice. How and where should he meet her ? What would he say to her ? How was this stupid misunderstanding to be brought to an end ? It was wonderful to think that in a few hours he might be actually seeing her, possibly even speaking to her or hearing her voice.

After his welcome from his father and Emily, he wanted to speak of her, to ask about her, but it was obviously impossible. Emily's tongue ran on, telling him of everything, and asking questions about himself.

He walked down the village in the afternoon. Perhaps Fate would be kind and he might meet her there. But Fate was not kind.

On the next day he went to see Mrs. Carford, and from her he learnt that she had gone abroad. He made several allusions to her which Mrs. Carford met, he thought, in rather a stupid way. She was amusing herself by teasing him, pretending not to see what he was driving at.

She was very fond indeed of both John and Beatrice and only too delighted to think she could do anything to bring them together.

"Do you think it very wrong to betray a confidence ?"

"Most certainly I do."

"Then listen to me doing wrong."

And she told him that she knew from Beatrice all about the state of affairs between them.

"Now," she said, "you've only got to find her and win her."

"Not such an easy task," he replied. Then he unburdened himself, telling her of the difficulties he foresaw, the chief one being her pride. He knew that in accepting him she would always be haunted in her own mind by the thought that she would appear to be taking him in consolation for the loss of Aubrey.

"I'll betray another confidence," said Mrs. Carford cheerily. "I seem to be doing lots of wicked things to-day."

She left the room, returning with a letter in her hand.

"Here is the letter she wrote me at the time you two stupid things quarrelled. It may be a very wrong thing to show the contents of a private letter to a third person, but I'm going to do it. I just want you to read the last five lines on that page."

John took the letter and read :

"I love John Cole, and no one else, and I never can love anyone else. But I have always been pledged to marry Aubrey and I am going to do so. If I marry him, I marry one man while I love another. If I do not marry him, I break a solemn pledge"

She watched his face as he read, and as he handed the letter back to her she asked :

"Have I done one more very wicked thing ?"

John felt inclined to put his arms round her and kiss her.

She went on to tell him that Beatrice had fled to Bruges, obviously with the desire of avoiding a meeting with him. She did not know her address. She

had written to her a few days ago, and Mrs. Mandersfield had told her *poste restante* only.

The address did not matter. John did not know if Bruges was a large town or a small one, but if it were the size of London, he'd search it till he found her.

He wanted to be off at once, but he could not decently leave Fir Grove for two days. Then he made excuses and got off to London, where there was further delay in connection with his passport.

Eventually he arrived in Bruges the day before the procession.

He spent the whole of that day going round the various hotels and making inquiries, but with no success. He lay awake all night in despair, and started off again next morning. He was in the Grande Place when the pageant passed through. He was temporarily distracted from his unhappy frame of mind by the beauty and the solemnity of the procession, and he followed the crowd behind it aimlessly down the Rue Haute into the Rue Longue. As the throng became a little less dense after passing over the Pont des Moulins he looked up and saw just over his head a notice "*Pension de famille*," It was not much use trying there, still he must take every one of them in turn. So he turned in through the archway, delighted to find himself out of the turmoil of the street in a quiet old garden. Passing through the garden he entered the hotel, and enquired at the office if Miss Mandersfield were staying there.

To his intense joy he was told that she was. Further inquiry elicited the information that she was out. She had gone to see the procession, and would probably soon be back.

He seated himself on a bench in the garden from which he could watch the entrance gate. He waited for a time that seemed to him an eternity. His mind, filled with thoughts of her, no longer revolved over the question as to what he should do, or what he should say. He could fix his mind on nothing, but just the fact that she was near him. Soon they would be standing face to face.

Beatrice remained at the window in the Rue Haute long after John had passed on.

The sight of him had brought back all the tender memories of last summer. It was astonishing that he should be here in Bruges, but she was not astonished. She had known that he would come. There was no escape. It was foolish to continue the fight against destiny, and to refuse to accept the happiness within her reach. She longed to go to him and tell him so. The original cause of the quarrel was ridiculous. She would not be so stupid again. But there was no getting over the fresh obstacle that she herself had created by accepting Aubrey—making any yielding to John now appear like an affair of convenience. She could not free herself from this odious thought.

She walked slowly back to the *pension*, and as she entered the garden, John rose from his seat and hastened towards her with a radiant look on his face.

She met him quite calmly. It was fortunate that she had seen him in the street and had been prepared.

They greeted one another in conventional terms and sat down on the garden seat.

John found speech very difficult and his voice trembled as he said :

"Beatrice, darling, I've come to ask you to marry me."

"I told you before," she replied, turning her head away for fear she might betray her emotion, "that I will never marry you. I have not changed my mind."

"But you haven't told me you don't love me."

"No. I shall never tell you that."

"Then what is it ?"

"Just this. When I accepted Aubrey, I finally refused you. When Aubrey rejected me, I was still not free to marry you."

"Oh, can't you see what I am driving at ?" she continued, as her eyes filled with tears. "Why do you torture me by making me say these things ? Surely it is quite clear that in accepting you it would look as if I were making the best of a bad job. I should lower myself in your eyes. And love cannot breathe in the same air as contempt."

"Darling, you know that I could never harbour such a despicable thought," he answered.

Then he told her of Mrs. Carford's breach of confidence. Of those lines in her letter which showed that he had always been first, and made it ridiculous to imagine that she only turned to him for consolation when she had lost Aubrey.

"It is awful talking under this restraint," he continued, "sitting here before the eyes of inquisitive passers-by. Can't we meet this afternoon ? I'll come and fetch you and we'll get away to some place where talking is possible."

"No. I must be alone for to-day," she answered. "Good-bye, John. I promise that you shall have your answer to-morrow."

"Then I'll come for you the first thing after breakfast."

"No. I am not going to be rushed into things. I must have all to-morrow to myself. You can come for me in the evening. Good-bye."

He rose and left her.

The remainder of the day seemed interminable, and at night he got no sleep, turning over in his mind the possibilities of the morrow.

He knew that she was going to revive that old argument about the marriage service, and the word "obey." What foolishness it was. Why did they ever put that word in the service. But he could satisfy her on that point. He would never expect "obedience" in the literal sense from her. If a man ever expected the fulfilment of that part of the marriage vow from a woman, he must be a fool. A women doesn't "obey" her husband in these days, but if he is what he ought to be, she will probably be guided by him in the larger things of life. What a tarnishing of true love it was to suggest that one should give orders to a person one loved. He thought of every possible argument. Beatrice would probably want to make a regular debate out of it again like she did in Sonamarg. But this time it should have a happier ending. If his arguments failed to convince, he would give in. He could fight no more.

In the afternoon of the next day he had a note from her. She would be on the little bridge over the canal by the Rue de l'Hydromel at nine o'clock. It was very quiet there and they could discuss the matter calmly and without fear of disturbance.

He was on the bridge soon after eight, passing the

slow-moving minutes by running through in his mind, the various points of his argument.

The twilight had deepened into darkness as he saw her loved form approaching from the opposite bank. He nerved himself for the inevitable discussion.

He rose from his sitting position on the parapet of the bridge and moved to meet her.

"Darling," he said.

Beatrice walked up to him as though in a trance. Then suddenly throwing aside restraint she put her hands on his two shoulders and looking up at him with a mischievous smile, murmured :

"and obey"

THE END

